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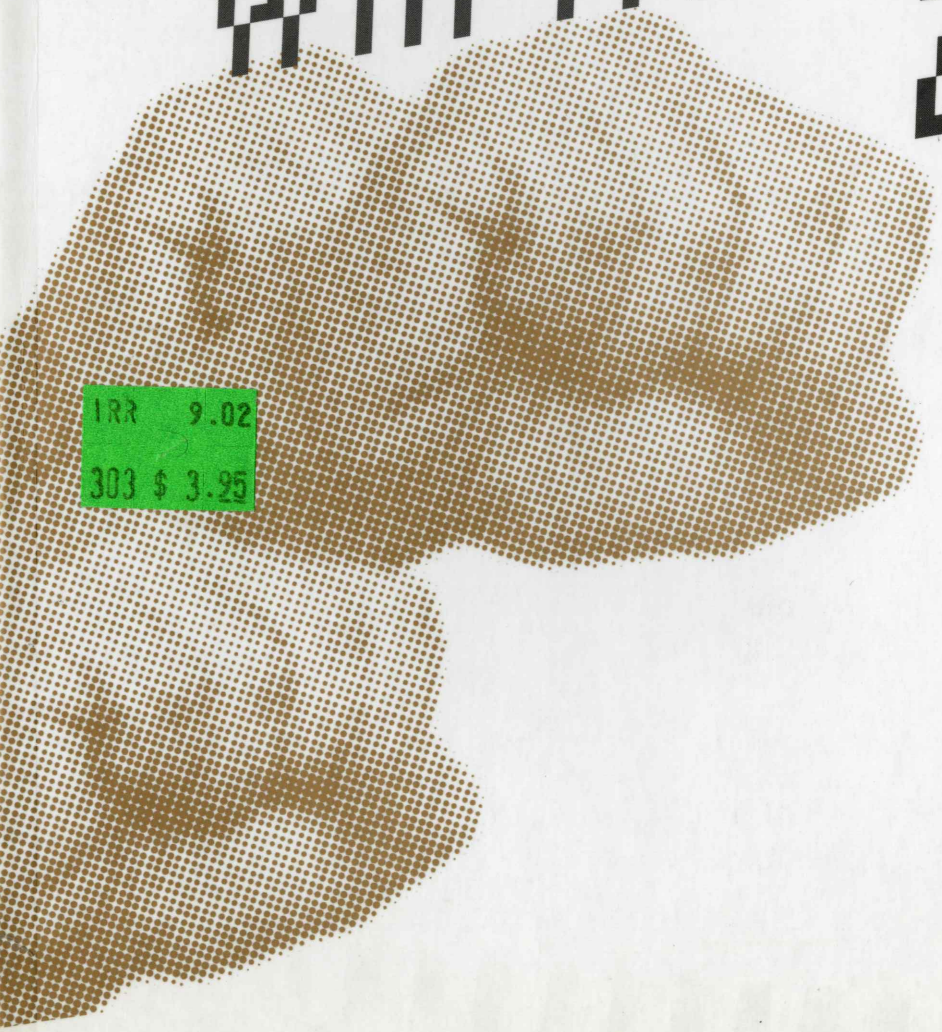

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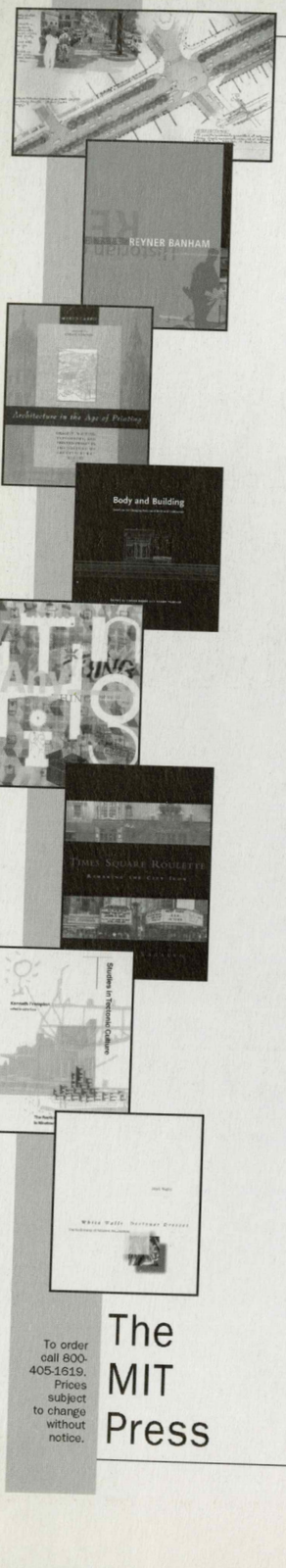

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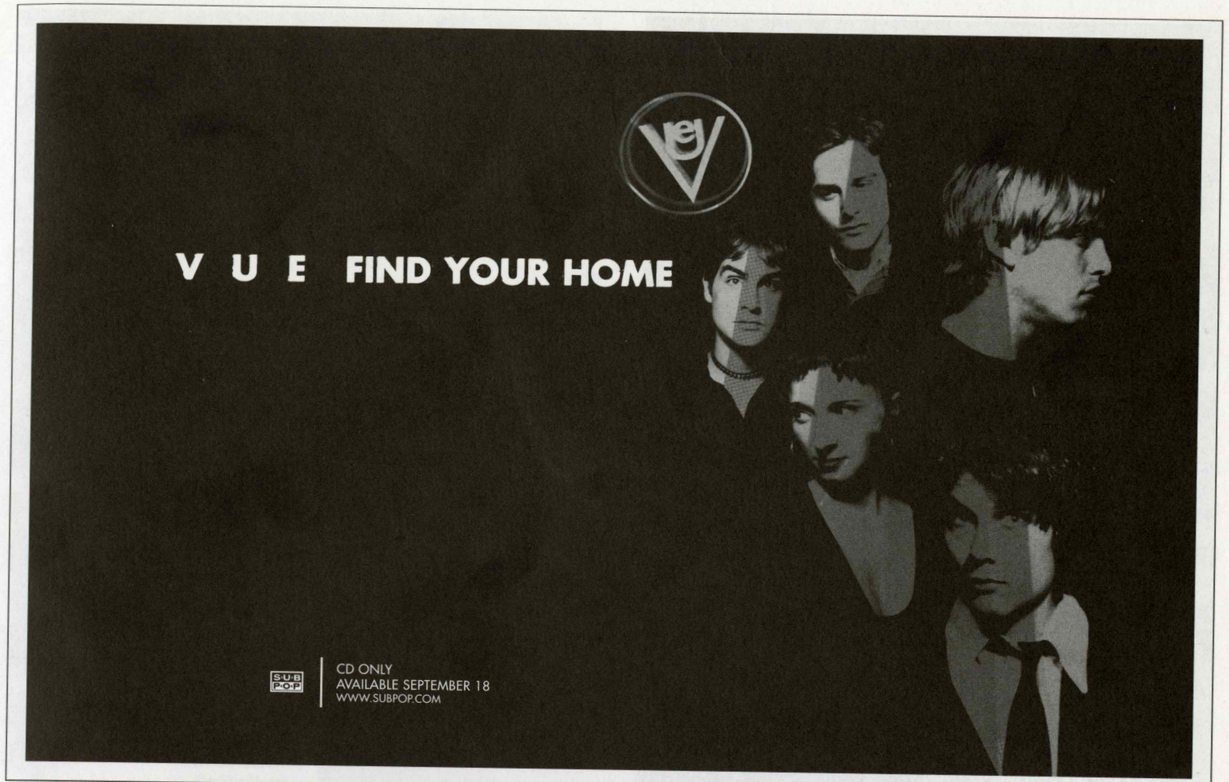

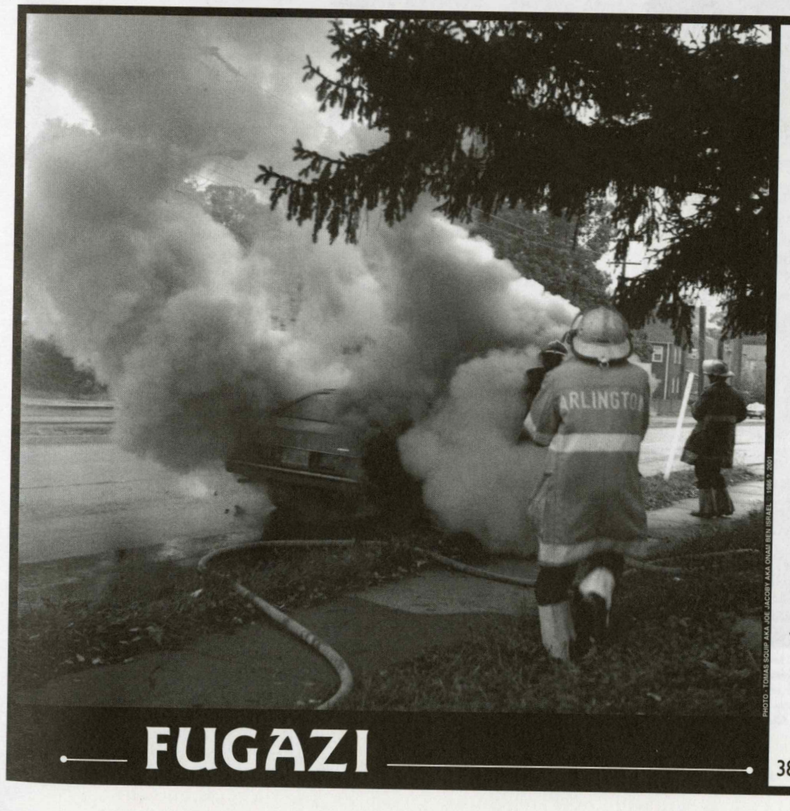

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Anxious Modernisms,
Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture
Edited by Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault
Reviewed by Chris Grimley

It has recently come to my attention that criticism has made a hasty exit from the world of critical writing. North American cultural adoption of political correctness has severed several qualities that used to provoke and amuse us in the arena of criticism. Cynicism is now usually met with soft disapproval and requests to "be nice." Nowhere is this more evident than in recent works of some architectural historians. Aside from the wit, sarcasm, and insight of Michael Sorkin, the overlooked academic barbs of Adrian Forty, the thorough research and polemic of Mike Davis, or the critical rigor of Beatrice Colomina, most current writing on architecture reads like it was an arduous task to produce, perhaps a necessity to fulfill tenure requirements.

Criticism, like cynicism, is dying a slow and under-reported death.

Derived from a joint symposium at Harvard's Graduate School of Design and the Canadian Center for Architecture, *Anxious Modernisms, Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture*, is a problematic entry into the arena of architectural history. Jointly edited by Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, the volume catalogs architects and designers active during the First and Second World Wars. Focusing on both well known figures such as Alison and Peter Smithson, Richard Neutra and Eero Saarinen as well as some overlooked by the canon, like the urbanist interventions of ATBAT-Afrique and the Japanese Metabolists, the editors and contributors attempt to demarcate an historical experimental period. Thoroughly modern in its orientation, they argue that this space on the time line expanded and extended architectural critique and debate from 1945 to the beginnings of postmodernism, marked by the publishing of Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture in 1966.*

To their credit, the authors' research is enjoyably precise and well documented. Each author footnotes extensively, often citing several rare primary sources that the authors are now able to gain access to. Regardless of, and perhaps because of, this emphasis on complete documentation, much of the writing lacks a sense of both humor and excitement, or as a friend is eager to point out, its distance does not allow a little bit of the ugly that informed much of the architecture and criticism of the period in question to seep in. When an author such as Timothy Rohan evokes the work of both William Jordy and Reyner Banham in his piece on Paul Rudolph's Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley College, he does so in a way that is stoic and academic. Banham and Jordy's emphasis on a cutting critique has somehow been lost in the translation to the doctoral dissertation. Rohan's argument that the decorative fenestration on the Jewett Arts Center was related to Rudolph's homosexuality, and that the later Brutalist strain of his work was an effort to repress the effeminate, comes across as a translation of facts, rather than the provocative argument that it suggests. Rohan's article is, however, one of the more successful essays in the book, as he does manage to simultaneously frame his argument around the architecture of the Jewett Arts Center itself and to convincingly evokes the cultural climate of the period.

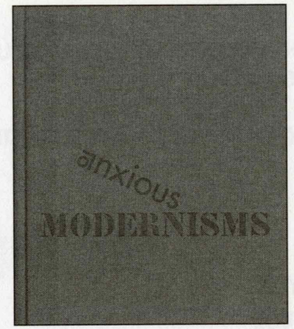
Goldhagen's article on the Smithson's domestic sensibility is one of the more initially interesting investigations into the postwar anxiety alluded to in the title of the book. Her article "Freedom's Domiciles" examines the Smithson's responses to the art, philosophy and architecture of the time, and the separate accounts of Alison and Peter Smithson's reaction to their own work several decades later. Goldhagen, whose writing here resembles stage directions for an imagined play, introduces the reader to a large cast of characters that bring personal recollection, theoretical analysis, and thoughts on art and architecture into the discussion. Heavily footnoted and cross referenced, Goldhagen's cast members include the Independent Groups' Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, Martin Heidigger and Jean Paul Sartre, Reyner Banham and Manfredo Tafuri, as well as a who's who of the European avant garde elite. Goldhagen paints these years as bound together in a loose critical agreement. As she notes several times, after the horror and trauma of the war, Existentialist ideas were inescapable. Particularly influential was the Sartrean notion of the authentic rooted itself in an examination of materiality that refuted the mass-produced Machine Aesthetic of the pre-war years. In the Smithson's hands, this thought was transformed into the surfaces and volume of their architecture. Goldhagen argues that in the Smithson's preference for heaviness over light structure, and dirt over steel, there exists an underlying consistency between the pop leanings evident in the House of the Future and the Art Brut-ness of their built work. Other critics, such as Kenneth Frampton and Reyner Banham have tended to separate these as distinct strains within their work. Ultimately the length of the essay, short at twenty-two pages, does not allow Goldhagen to fully realize the complexities and nuances of her argument.

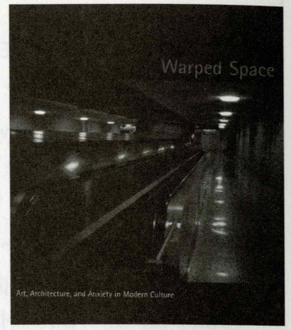
Some of the more successful portions of the book are those that respond not to architecture directly, but rather to a formulation of Modernism that is not commodified at its roots. Felicity Scott's article regarding Bernard Rudofsky's Architecture without Architects show at the MoMA is a breath of fresh air. Scott's chapter focuses on one of the primary anxieties of a theoretical modernism that is not evident in other chapters of the book: an inherent philosophical state of displacement and homelessness. In the photography that Rudofsky presented in the exhibition and accompanying catalogue of "non-pedigreed architecture," he visibly argued that the modern subject was confronted by the psychological difference between his contrasting concepts of "house" and "home." "Home," as Rudofsky explains, is the unrestricted movement through national boundaries and political territories via the methods and technologies that modernism produced – the car, the boat and the tent. The construction of "house" is not the reconciliation of modernism with architecture: indeed it is through the house that architecture and imagination become restricted and tied to a system of commodification. This is, he argues, can be seen in the post-war creation and settlement of large suburban developments. Post-War modernism's attempt to confront the reality of this theory was answered in part by the retreat to form noted in the emergence of an architectural Postmodernism.

This anxiety of the modern experience points to one of the disconcerting aspects raised by Anxious Modernisms: the conflict between the necessity of theory, and the reality of practice. If theory is indeed dead (as was proclaimed by Peter Eisenman and *Architecture* magazine last year), then practice must be following closely on its heels. *Anxious Modernisms* wants to open a dialog between these two traditionally opposed ideologies and reconcile them in a manner that is neither convincing or provocative.

The ultimate shallowness of this reconciliatory effort occurs in Goldhagen's coda. She outlines her argument for the reformulation of the universal modernism into a new, tri-partite association. This set as consisting of consentualist, negativist and reformist tendencies, their ideologies divide into that of political partisanship, all appearing within one loosely defined political system. Goldhagen focuses her description on the centrist reformists who account for largest group of Modern architects working after W.W.II that includes Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Richard Neutra. This group is further divided on phenomenological terms, including such architects as Alvar Aalto, Eileen Gray, Hans Scharoun and Bruno Taut, whom she christens 'situated modernists.'

These practitioners, as Goldhagen describes them, figure within what this critic calls 'good liberalism.' (The writers of many of the pieces in this collection could be similarly categorized.) These architects and writers do not want to disrupt the freedom of the political, primarily capitalist democratic systems in which they live. Indeed, Goldhagen emphasizes that her use of the 'situated' has nothing whatsoever to do with the revolutionary tactics of the Situationist International, whose praxis dislocated and disrupted our understanding and interpretation of both our cities and the spectacles within them (and who are only perfunctorily outlined in another chapter in the book). Rather the situated is embedded in the desire to "situate the users of the building socially and historically." This politic, whose ultimate effect is the maintenance of the status quo, sits easily on the fence, operating comfortably within the confines of acceptable criticism. In fact, the "situated," whose provenance in Kenneth Frampton's Critical Regionalism is clear, collapses into the same aesthetic dispositions that have been criticized in Frampton's formulation of an arrière-garde. It is this lack of a real and extended commitment to a political stance that makes the academicism of Anxious Modernisms read not as an exciting new history of modern architecture in relation to the emergence of post-modernism, but unfortunately as an exercise in describing a new canon.





Warped Space: Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture
Anthony Vidler
MIT Press, 2000
Reviewed by Jesse LeCavalier

Flashback to 1993, sixteen-bits still the rule the video game world and a little network called FOX is broadcasting a new sketch-based comedy called "the Edge" peppered by the heroic visages of Julie Brown, Wayne Knight and Jennifer Anniston. Throughout *Warped Space*, one particular short piece called "What the Agoraphobic-Claustrophobic is Doing Right This Minute" kept coming to mind. It opens with a shot a quiet suburban bungalow from which comes a scream followed by a woman running out side. Once outside, she pauses, looks around nervously, screams and runs back inside, pauses, screams, runs back outside, pauses, screams… the cycle repeats once and then fades to commercial. In one thirty second sketch, the premise and much of the content of Anthony Vidler's book is nicely summarized: modern life makes us loco and fundamentally destabilizes spatial conditions upon which we thought we could depend, leaving us alienated and uncomfortable. Add a little paranoia into the mix and a lot of quotations from early twentieth century aesthetic, spatial and cultural theorists and you're good to go. One of Vidler's premises is that we're all crazy, a bunch of crazy nuts running around in cities trying not to touch or look at other subjects or objects and that architectural and artistic production concretizes that condition. Ostensibly, this book develops these claims through a series exegeses and case studies which range from limpid to opaque and from inventive to pat. Each chapter lends itself to be taken individually but the real strength of the work lies in its overall engagement with recent developments with the hopes of reaching new understandings and definitions of "space."

Warped Space is presented in loosely tethered halves, both of which register more as collections of self-sufficient essays related only by a shared set of interests and sympathies. The first charts the development of the urban and spatial pathologies in question and the second turns this "warped" lens to case studies of contemporary art and architecture. In the author's own words, "In this book I explore the anxious visions of the modern subject caught in spatial systems beyond its control and attempting to make representational and architectural sense of its predicament." From the beginning, he positions the book as a tentative initial step, which wilts the entire project. Nonetheless, the premise is engaging enough to maintain some integrity even without a strong thesis. Vidler draws from an array authors in the first eight chapters: Benjamin and Freud mostly but also Simmel, Kracauer, Eisenstein, Bataille, Rand, and Le Corbusier. In the second half, the architectural case studies are what you might expect in a book called *Warped Space*: Coop Himmelblau, Eric Owen Moss, Morphosis, Greg Lynn and Daniel Libeskind. The predictability of these examples is disappointing and saps some potency from the book. Still, Vidler manages to keep a critical eye and, by drawing from his well of literary and critical background, to offer some inventive readings of the projects at hand. Consider the chapter titled "Skin and Bones: Folded Forms from Leibniz to Lynn" in which Vidler, in reference to Deleuze and his folds, points out that "it is not at all clear that folds, in the sense of folded forms, correspond in any way to Deleuze's concept…the consequences of these distinctions for 'folded' architecture are significant, especially as designers and theorists have tended to see the Deleuzean model as an invitation for a rather literal folding of the envelope… that tends to ignore rather than privilege the interior". To counter the more conventional reading, Vidler offers the following: "No literal interpretation of 'folding' or of material folds, whether of fabric, façade, or space, can perform the Deleuzean/Leibnizian function; it would not be so much a question of illustrating complex folds, with all the geometric rigor of computer-generated images, as it would be of discovering the equivalent 'form' that might join the two floors of the material and immaterial". It is a good thing that some of Vidler's analyses are inventive because his choices are simply too easy. It would have been more interesting and provocative if he turned his eye away from new-skool decon architects to work which has formally less to do with some kind of "warping" – perhaps the way spatial anxiety is played out in a Herzog & deMeuron, Nouvel or Seijima project. On the other hand, the five artists in question prove less predictable as case studies (though all deal with architecture in some way) and their examinations are rewarding; unfortunately it is also the only instance, in a book that spends a good deal of time addressing gendered space, that female voices are actually heard. Vito Acconci, Rachel Whiteread, Toba Khedoori, Mike Kelley and Martha Rosler each have a chapter devoted to their work and its relationship to the ideas outlined in the first half of *Warped Space*.

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Warped Space is good because of its breadth, because of Vidler's comfortable writing style and because of his demonstrated cultural literacy and understanding of the material in question. There might be a reference to Bataille and to Superman's Fortress of Solitude in the same sentence and he name-checks "hip" things like Gibson, *The Matrix, A Bug's Life* all in pointed ways (It should be noted that sometimes this self-conscious coolness is undermined with phrases like "Space warp has become an almost daily experience as we are hurled at apparently mind-numbing speed through the computer simulated corridors of the latest cd-rom game release..." See? It's not as bad as listening to your parents rap but still a little rough.) In spite of the lively writing and stimulating content, the work runs into trouble in a few spots.

The range of sources in *Warped Space* strengthens it but also stretches the continuity nearly to failure. Occasionally Vidler's text wanders into a realm of obscure and tangential references where readers feel a little like Al Michaels in the booth next to Dennis Miller: slightly amused, a little concerned and mostly just baffled. Another larger concern has to do with Vidler's methodology in which he uses late nineteenth- and early twentieth century critical writing to study art and architecture of only the last ten years. One wonders if it's not a little like looking at Hadid with Vitruvius in hand. Certainly the idea that modern psychoanalytic and spatial theory offers new and relevant insight to the architectural and artistic trajectories of the last ten years is intriguing but raises questions about the scope of the inquiry. Much of his analysis has to do with urban space of today but it seems problematic to rely on these texts from an era in which urban space (or lack of it) was seen as a primarily malignant entity and cities seen as badbad things that make you sick. Vidler, canny as ever, addresses this leap by writing:
"To compare contemporary forms of expression to early twentieth century avant-garde aesthetics may seem forced, however, or at least superficial; after all, the revivalisms of postmodernism and deconstructivism have tended to debase any sense of continuity with the architecture of the teens and twenties".

He is arguing for typically more continuity over the last century (a very "art-history" kind of thing to do) and as readers, we pretty much have to shut up and go along with the conceit if we want to get much out of the work. He further defends the comparison with some astute observations that support the claims of a continuum longer than perhaps usually accepted:
"While it is true that the gamut of representational techniques has apparently increased, it is also the case that little has changed in the framing of space itself over the modern period. Perspective is still the rule in virtual reality environments; objects are still conceived and represented within all the three-dimensional conventions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practice."
Vidler manages to sidestep these concerns a little, but questions about why and when and who continue to surface.

Each chapter of *Warped Space* is relatively autonomous and can be read in any order, which makes it welcome on the ol' bookshelf. However, the real value of the book comes when it is seen as a complete entity whose overall goal, it seems, is to redefine "space" or to at least identify new spatial paradigms in ways that are relevant, applicable and understandable given our current conditions. Most of the chapters raise new questions about how space, architectural, social, and cultural, is both constructed and defined. Some do it more explicitly than others and some more successfully than others, but all seek to question and reexamine our assumptions about space. The examination of spatial understanding is exciting because it is a step toward an engagement with new tools and technologies in a way that leads not just to new forms but new space, (perhaps similar to the spatial shifts triggered by supremacist and DeStijl employment of axonometric/isometric projections?). In other words, *Warped Space* is not simply a catalogue of recent architectural developments but the beginnings of a search for their meanings.

Three of the most exciting explorations into the world of space are the notions of "post-domestic space" in the work of Rachel Whiteread, the violent and exhausted space in the work of Bataille and a reading of Daniel Libeskind's work as "post-spatial." At the heart of this endeavor is Vidler's identification of the changing role and perceptions of modern space, which "from the late nineteenth century to the present ... space [was considered] a projection of the subject, and thus as a harbinger of and repository of all the neuroses and phobias of that subject. Space in this ascription, is not empty, but full of disturbing objects and forms, among which the forms of architecture and the city take their place." Space, in this sense, is no longer a panacean expanse but something to be avoided, something to be afraid of. Along these lines, it s no surprise that Vidler spends some time talking about the O.J. Simpson trial and, in reference to the glove, how space cannot be trusted anymore:
"The entire trial was destabilized by a defense that exploited space against object, that knew how to set in motion every fixed notion and stable clue by situating it in a field of other spaces and sites that raised the possibility of doubt as to its fixed place. The fluidity of space was pitched against the stability of place, the object consistently displaced by its spatial field."
In other words, no one could be sure where the evidence really was, and therefore the absoluteness of space can no longer be relied upon.

There is a tendency among architects to beatify space for its own sake so one of the really valuable things about Vidler's book is a willingness to critically question those assumptions in ways that will help us move forward in our understanding, engagement and deployment of it. In the chapter "X marks the spot," he cites Bataille, who argues, "Space is 'pure violence,' escaping time and geometry to affirm its presence as the expression of the here-now, the instantaneous, the simultaneous, and, by extension, the event." This is not to say that Vidler denies space, or that he is seeking to eliminate its importance (as Frampton seems to want to do in Studies in Tectonic Culture) but more to examine its role in our perception and experience of contemporary urban conditions. Though *Warped Space* suffers from some scattered content, uninventive case studies and some strange methodology, the resulting examination of contemporary ideas of space proves to be ultimately worthwhile, even if we're all crazy.

END

THE TELEVISION IN THE GARDEN *TEXT BY: JENNIFER GABRYS*

When architects Rem Koolhas and Kenneth Yeang discussed "Cities on the Move," a recent exhibition on design and art in key Asian cities, they used the phrase "wish landscapes" to describe a noticeable tendency in urban projects to amalgamate every desirable landscape in the world. Wish landscapes provide for the consumption of the ecstatic experience and nothing less. This condition of hybridity, by extension, can be seen as a space of fantasy that is located within the city, garden, home, harem and television.

Idealized landscapes are not novel phenomena, but the spaces in which they play out continue to mutate. A particular instance of this change can be found by tracing the establishment of the Arcadia Arboretum in Los Angeles, and later the filming of the television episode Fantasy Island within the Arboretum in the late seventies and early eighties. Constructing Eden, virtual or otherwise, merges in this history of Fantasy Island and the Arcadia Arboretum. While they share moments of physical space, each of these Edens is constructed with different media, and the media itself ultimately produces new idealized landscapes.

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The arboretum, aptly named Arcadia, is itself a hybrid collection of every exotic and luscious plant to be found on the globe, with gardens organized according to continent. Lucky Baldwin, pioneer and proprietor, is responsible for the transformation of the site when he purchased the land in 1875. In establishing his ranch, he converted the desert setting to a romantic garden. Lucky built a Queen Anne cottage for his deceased third wife. This cottage was later to become the primary setting and icon for the opening shots of Fantasy Island. *(IMAGE 1.)*

Transforming the desert into an idealized garden confronts a perceived void and makes it a stage for our desires. That is exactly how Lucky dished his tricks at Rancho Santa Anita. He planted the place over as an oasis in the desert and had a constant stream of mistresses to keep him entertained. Presto: the desert was transformed into a promised land of earthly delights. Lucky's staking out of the desert, and construction of a wished-for landscape, seems to hail straight from even older notions of that pastoral paradise, Arcadia. *(IMAGE 2.)*

How we imagine the landscape of paradise can ultimately shape what we see. *In Landscapes of Desire*, William McClung recounts how the earliest mappings of California delineated the state as an island, most likely influenced not by actual geography but by a then-popular romance novel that described an island, an earthly paradise very similar to California. In the confusion of the real and the imaginary, fantasy becomes a structuring principle for how we see and make landscape.

Where exactly landscape is made, however, can be an indistinct locus. Fantasy Island is a landscape devoted exclusively to wish fulfillment, but the setting is at once the arboretum, a mythical island, and a television screen. Broadcast between January 1978 until August 1984, the television episode starred Ricardo Montalban as Roarke and Herve Villechaize as the "vertically challenged" Tattoo. *(IMAGE 3.)* A significant portion of the show was shot at the Arboretum in Arcadia. The Queen Anne cottage exterior was used extensively in opening

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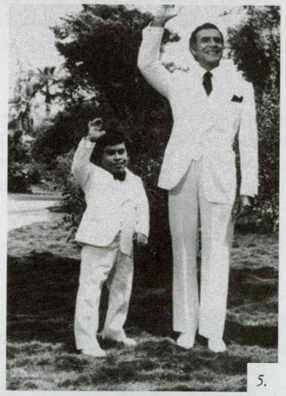

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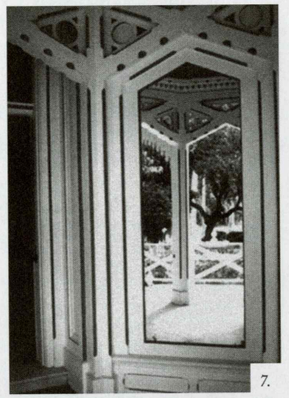
footage, and the plane motored in across the arboretum lagoon. The signature bell-tolling and opening cry of Tattoo, "De plane, de plane," was also shot in the tower of the Queen Anne cottage. *(IMAGE 4.)*

But the opening sequence of Fantasy Island situates the televised island in the middle of endless horizons of ocean, with the island boasting spectacular waterfalls and high cliffs. This sequence was actually shot in Kauai. Together with the other filming sites it forms a landscape collage that telescopes the viewer from an indeterminate void to the mythical island. The hopper plane navigates the void, appearing from indistinct origins and a presumed desert of unfulfilled desire, to arrive at the gentle and promising lagoon of Fantasy Island. In the episode, "The Séance," it is noted that the island is perhaps the only place where one can communicate with the dead.In "The Treasure," a childhood home is recreated as a beginning point for a man whose fantasy is infinite wealth. It is as though the island itself writes the script of fantasy and at the end the guests depart into the same void they came from, but it is now charged with the expectation of happily-ever-after. *(IMAGE 5.)*

Establishing the place of fantasy is essential to its realization. Further telescoping of fantasy space within fantasy space and islands within the island, occurs in harems, childhood homes, and automobiles. Even Tattoo is allowed to indulge his fantasy, when in one particular episode he is unusually depressed by the fact of his height. How can he, be at the service of so many fantasies when he must suffer his imperfect and short stature in a tall world. To console him, Roarke offers Tattoo his very own island automobile, appropriately sized. The epitome of a personalized fantasy island, this souped-up red golf cart with candy-striped awning is the wish granted that finally perks up Tattoo. *(IMAGE 6.)*



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Telescoping out from these wish micro-landscapes brings the television set into focus—a particular instrument for framing and assembling wish landscapes. The television itself has been called a wishing machine, an apparatus of desire; and contained within it are many micro-islands of fantasy. Like a peepshow, the television holds the promise of a larger, more exciting world beyond. *(IMAGE 7.)* And it further defines, in a sense, what we see as desirable or wished-for landscapes. While the Arboretum contains gardens from across the world, a tropical savanna location was chosen, complete with palms and lagoon, and accessory hula girls, as the filming site for Fantasy Island. Like the obligatory "smiles, everyone, smiles" that Roarke bellows to the island workers upon the arrival of guests, these are the scenic props that ensure our wishes will be fulfilled. *(IMAGE 8.)*

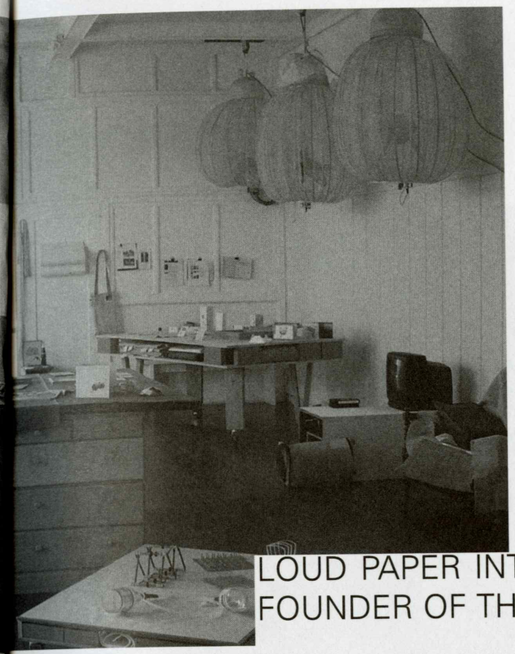
More often than not, chasing one's fantasy and arriving under the tutelage of Roarke and Tattoo leads to the revision of fantasy. In "The Treasure," the man in search of infinite wealth nearly drowns trying to unearth a gold statue. He says, "What have I got to lose," and "Is it un-American to want something better?" A feeling of desperation and hopelessness about current circumstances fuels the pursuit of fantasy. But when the same man is rewarded with wealth, he doesn't know whether he should be glad or grieved that his wish is fulfilled. The same is true in "The Sheik," when a teacher of a private girls' school wishes to have women at his command in his own harem. Making and revising fantasy is much easier and more elastic in a televised paradise. If only Lucky could have looped between the utterance of his wishes and the revision of those wishes, between a desert, a garden and an easily exchangeable harem.

In many ways, Lucky was the early set designer for this later televised world. Unknowingly, he was shaping not only a garden, but also a set of narratives and framing screens for that garden. Multiple films and television shows from Tarzan and the Huntress to Lassie and Jungle Jim were all shot at the Arboretum. The transformation of the site evolved from shaping an actual edenic garden to shaping the site through a camera lens. A previous director of the Arboretum, Francis Ching, once noted that the landscape of Los Angeles, like that of the Arboretum, is ninety nine percent introduced material, and without this material the landscape would be a "virtual desert." Now, arguably, the remaining one percent of material is the structuring frame, the television screen that is, as Virilio says, the "third window that...opens onto a phoney day." This frame displaces all material to a condition of the introduced, of the spectacular.

The construction of these landscapes, idealized garden and televised spatial fantasies within the garden one hundred years later, blurs the real and imaginary components of landscape and raises the question of where landscapes are actually made. The Arcadia Arboretum, Fantasy Island and the individual television set coalesce into a series of frames, islands and instruments that construct landscapes at the same time that they construct wishes. END

IMAGES:

1. Queen Anne Cottage setting at Arcadia Arboretum, 2000. Photo by author.
2. H. H. Cross painting, 1889. Queen Anne cottage and Baldwin Lake. Seated in foreground: E.J. "Lucky" Baldwin with daughter Anita. Photo courtesy of Arcadia Arboretum.
3. Ricardo Montalban as Mr. Roarke and Herve Villechaize as Tattoo in Fantasy Island. Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Television.
4. Fantasy Island hydroplane. Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Television.
5. Tattoo and Mr. Roarke greet guests as they arrive on Fantasy Island. Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Television.
6. Mr. Roarke presents Tattoo with a miniaturized version of his own car on Fantasy Island. Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Television.
7. Queen Anne Cottage frames within frame at Arcadia Arboretum, 2000. Photo by author.
8. Surrounded by the local villagers, Mr. Roarke and Tattoo await the arrival of guests to Fantasy Island. Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Television.



LOUD PAPER INTERVIEWS AMY FRANCESCHINI, ARTIST AND FOUNDER OF THE DESIGN STUDIO, FUTURE FARMERS.

AF: So, what do you want to know?

LP: How do you come up with the forms and structures of your programs?

AF: I spend a lot of time making things. I have all this stuff inside and the computer is the easiest way to get them out. It is a tool I've been using for the last few years, so it is an easy way to sketch. For about five hours a day I just make stuff and don't really think about it. I just make, make, make. It is my own fantasy world.

I make little 3-D characters and I make the little scenes that they are in. It just makes me happy. I replay them and watch them a hundred times.

I have this library of artwork that has evolved, so when I have a specific idea, for instance, Sascha and a group of two other programmers (Justin Baske and Josh On, my business partner), we've been working on a piece called Communiculture.

LP: I saw that on your site. Tell me more about it.

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AF: It's complicated to talk about. I do all this commercial work, which totally feeds into the experimental work. Companies come to Future Farmers with new media, so we are learning about the newest media and having to design for it. When I first started on web sites it was a whole new kind of design, really. Now we are working on cell phones, and that is another new kind of design. There are three shades of gray and it's a twelve-by-twelve pixel. Make something in that twelve-by-twelve pixel.

To me, that's really exciting. To narrow your whole world down to a twelve-by-twelve pixel and three colors is pretty intense.

When we started doing stuff for Palm Pilots and Gameboy games my artwork was becoming more like that: game looking and pixelly. So I had this library of artwork... Sascha was in my studio. He always checks his stats on his web site, every ten minutes he's looking to see who came. Who's visiting and where they came from. One day he said "Seven thousand people came from Future Farmers to my web site today. "I wasn't really super-excited. I was like "That's great." And he said, "Don't you understand? Imagine if seven thousand people were standing in front of you and they were all looking at you. Can you see how exciting that would be? It's like I'm a rock star. Do you realize how many people go to Future Farmers, if I got seven thousand hits from there?"

Well I didn't buy the URL. A friend bought it for me, so I didn't have access to the stats. But Sascha was insistent that I find them out. We finally got them and we looked and there were sixty thousand people coming.

I'm not so interested in the numbers, but I am interested in who those people are who are coming and what we can give back to them. I don't want sixty thousand people coming to Future Farmers just to see pretty design. I want to give them a resource. Give them some sort of information.

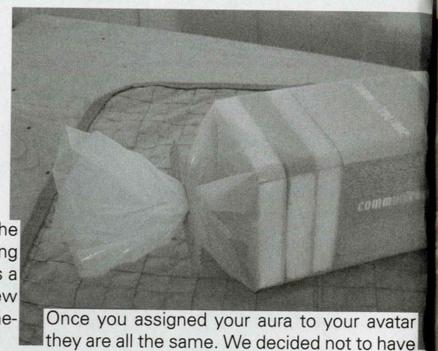
I wanted to build this forest that when you log on it's just a forest but you can claim a plot on a tree. When you roll over the plots you see who's there. If the tree is full you can look for another one. The forest grows.

It started with just the Future Farmers, but as more people log on another tree pops up. This landscape grows and becomes navigable. You can go through it and it will grow infinitely.

When you claim a plot you go and create an avatar of yourself. At the time companies were coming to us and were like "Can you do an online community? We want to have an avatar where people have blue eyes, black eyes, red hair, a jacket." All these physical attributes. I thought can't we have something else that represents people besides these physical attributes? An aura or a personality?

I was working with Justin Baske, who was the artist in residence at the time, and we were eating dinner and I was like "Can't we do an animation where people can choose the representation which suits themselves?" He said, "I can write a set of behaviors and people can choose from them."

So at first we started out where you can choose your symbol, which is an aura. And you can choose the color of those symbols. You could choose from a library. One of them was spacey. One of them was all-surrounding, which made you seem like a grounded person. We evolved the program you could draw your aura and it would follow what you drew. So if you wanted to be super mad, your aura would reflect that.



Once you assigned your aura to your avatar they are all the same. We decided not to have any physical attributes.

So you would save yourself. And then you have two options. You can change your avatar aura or you can go to a plot. When you first log on you get an empty plot. There's some artwork you can choose from and you can design your plot.

Each of these graphics can represent you bank of resources; there's a house and there is water and light and stuff. So what we want to have people do is to upload resources that they want to make public. Like anything: reading list, fonts, programs, whatever they want and they can assign it to different graphics. When other people log on you can go visit anyone's plot and you can basically retrieve their resources.

LP: I'm interested in this piece in that you are using natural metaphors within the digital format. How do you feel about that?

AF: In my artwork that's what I deal with- the endangerment of the environment. Being involved in this Internet industry made me sad in a lot of ways. Especially in the Bay Area, watching this huge economic boom and no one was conscious of anything except for making money and spending it, and making more money and growing. And it's like, wait a minute. Are we taking any time to stop and think about what is this growth doing? It is basically doing something to us. And I think that the Internet, especially our Web site, is reaching so many people that I really wanted to somehow make that evident.

That's always been one of my goals is to use these natural metaphors, and I think for me all the answers are in nature. I really look to nature as a system, or systems in nature, to pull from and create online in a lot of things I do.

LP: What about this relationship between the slickness and culture? The slickness of the digital imagery?

AF: I have a contradiction with it myself, in that I hate the slickness of it and sometimes I find myself loving it. I think that comes from fears in my personal work. I like doing stuff digitally because you do have so much control and can perfectly render things and can get things extruded to be perfectly like you made them in a 3D program. There's something that fascinates me about that. But then it also really freaks me out, because as humans we have a lot of control, and that scares me because it's almost a farce. It's like, oh we have all this control, and I don't have to worry about anything because we can control everything.

When I first started doing print design, I really fought the digital slickness. I'd leave rips in scans and I'd burn the edges of the paper and I'd make things look old, as if they were from an old Berkeley kind of thrift store and had mold stains on it and stuff. I tried to incorporate that in my work. And then I got really obsessed with the thing being clean and tight and controlled in a way. I don't know. It's a contradiction within myself. I fight it all the time. Sometimes I look at this stuff and I go "Ugh!" I hate it. It's so controlled and clean! I just want things to be crazy!

When I collaborated on Holding Patterns, I rendered it all in 3D and then I gave it to the sculptor, fabricator and industrial designer.It had to be defined and finished to give to them so that they could build it. But in the process of testing it, it looked really different. It was all wires. They had this energy, and I was like, "That's what I like." It was more chaotic and more natural and kind of eerie.

And then we put this fancy bird in there and put it in the gallery and it looked all pretty and I got really mad at it. And little kids would come and go, "Oh it's great!" They'd lay on the floor and be so happy and that's really great. I love that part of it, but I also was frustrated, because the thing I was trying to address was that these birds are dying and that the economic impact is affecting them, and the data that was making these birds fly was driven from transportation stats.

LP: It wasn't live data that you were using?

AF: No, none of it was live. Everyday we updated it to a Web site. Because the only stats we could get that were even close to live were from the Bay Bridge, and they wouldn't give it to us until the end of the day. Because they didn't have a way to give it to us, that's what they said. So all of it was daily stats that were then put to a web site and then run through a program to interpret the data, because we designed how we wanted the data to affect these pieces.

LP: So what would happen?

AF: What would happen is, as the traffic would peak during the morning hours, these bulbs went up to the ceiling and collapsed and got dark, and the birds stopped flying. And as the traffic would start to lull during the afternoons and the late evenings, the pods would come down to the ground and expand and the birds would start flying and the light would come back on. And on the floor were these moving blankets but I kind of made them into these islands, so they kind of represented the wetlands. So they were like coming down to roost on their endangered wetlands.

But I don't know... the slickness thing. I'm not sure where I fall in there. I love it and I hate it.

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LP: I'm interested in this piece in how you reach out into the urban environment and sort of bring it into... It's like taking the street and bringing it into your work. Do you have more ideas for doing that?

AF: I never really thought about it like bringing the street in. I'm interested in that opening and closing of what goes on in the streets during the day and what goes on at night. It's just a different world. In the environment too. But specific to your question, I visited Hong Kong last January. I had jet lag so I got up at five in the morning and I went over to the Caloun island to Mong Koc. This really intense area with all these meat markets and markets and it was totally empty, and I just started videotaping when I saw this guy pushing this cart that was all wrapped up, and it was just really beautiful how it had straps all over it. All his stuff was on this cart. And then another one came out and then another one came out. I just got really dazed and I videotaped for two hours this scene. All these carts were coming out of somewhere and they were unfolding them and building them up into markets. Some of them were toys, some of them were clothes, some of them were pillows or whatever.

But then at the end of each block, on either side, they'd pull out their cart and unfold it and set up a table. They'd put on a headphone (and it would be like an infomercial, all day long, about these products. They'd show you how to shrink-wrap your calculators.

One of them was a grape peeler, and it was this woman telling you how to peel grapes. So I videotaped it. This idea of almost these mobile infomercials was kind of interesting to me and I wanted to show this somehow.

LP: It also sounds like a Communiculture.

AF: Yeah! It's true. I never thought of that.

I really want to make one of these things. I'm really into these backpacks. My ultimate dream is to put on a backpack, walk and never have to have a home. To just go. That's my little psychological out.

I started making these backpacks and thinking what would be the most minimal thing I could carry on my back that I could survive on. So in those backpacks is a CD-ROM of all these images and all my files that I couldn't live without. They're sown in.

The backpack has all this stuff that folds out into an infomercial. It might be this huge, unwieldy backpack, or maybe it's all strapped down. Or it'll be a cart that has multiple uses and modularities.

LP: A wearable cart... Since *loud paper* deals with architecture, do you see your work expanding more into a more built environment? You're touching on it with these ideas of carts and backpacks.

AF: My next dream of what I want to do is more architectural stuff. Especially with these carts, I'm really into these modular worlds that keep unfolding and folding and changing, and you can never figure out what there original form is or how it's supposed to be. That's something that I like.

I render a lot of stuff in 3D programs before I build them, so I can show them to fabricators or whatever. Once I rendered this little space. It was a slice of bread, but it was actually a living quarter. I rendered it in a 3D program and I tried to build a model of it. In a 3D program you don't need nails, you don't need glue, you can just stick a wall on and then stick this wall on and it sits there. So I got all the materials I thought I needed to make this thing, and I started to cut them out and make the shapes I had made in the 3D model, and I kind of held them together and I let them go and watched them fall on the ground. And that became really interesting to me, like this disruption of the concept of things being held together by engineering. Engineering that goes into architecture just baffles me. I could never build something like a huge building because it's just too insane to even think about how it would really work.

LP: What about this idea of play within your work? Are the games there because you work with clients that require games, or is that something that you bring to it?

AF: I think the game thing started with working with Sascha. I liked making animations a lot and as I said before, it's my escape, my fantasy world. It's kind of weird to me, the little characters, because it's almost like you're playing God for a minute. You move the eye this much and you're like Oh! It's perfect! It's somehow this fantasy world and I love being in it. It's these little people and it's their little personalities. And Sascha... and most of the programmers I work with have all these game ideas, but they have no graphics, and nothing to put them together with. And they show me these pixels moving around and it's really scrappy.

So when I met Sascha he got so excited by these graphics and I got so excited by the game. Because then it givesit another dimension. It's like, okay I've made the animations and put personalities in these people, but now what happens when other people get to move them. And I think we both got really excited by that.

When I was a kid I played Ms. PacMan. I was a super-avid Ms. PacMan fan. But I kind of vowed not to play video games or PlayStation because I know I'll get addicted. I really love playing games, but I don't want to because I know I could get lost in that world. So it became really fun to make games. It wasn't that we proposed it to clients so much, but clients would come and ask us to make a game. It just evolved that way.

My online work is another contradiction. It is really playful. And it's something that personally makes me happy even if I'm designing a serious section of Future Farmers about our client work or our work, I always want there to be an out for people while they're there to interact with some little character or for a character to be doing something kind of weird and maybe all of a sudden it'll turn it's head around and look at the viewer. Or some other activity for the person to do that is more fantastical than just pure information. And I think that's how I am. I'm really easily distracted. I take it all in, but if something beautiful is around I'm going to look at that. And that's how it is in the world, you know? It's like even a crack in the floor could take your attention away. And I think online as a designer you have to facilitate those cracks.

LP: Your way of facilitating cracks is almost like making grit in the machine.

AF: Yeah. Dirt. I love dirt.

Making it tactile, or humanoid. Yeah. And I thought that was kind of nice: to keep the awkwardness in the technology.

But yeah, I like surprises. We just like to hide things. So there's places on Future Farmers where people may never ever see the stuff, but if you accidentally hit an A-key a window will pop up and it'll say something or there'll be an animation. Or if you accidentally triple-click on something other things pop up. They're really personal. I feel like no one's ever going to find them, but if they do it's going to be great.

LP: What about the game being sort of an endless game? It's all about wandering and about endless discovery, rather than winning.

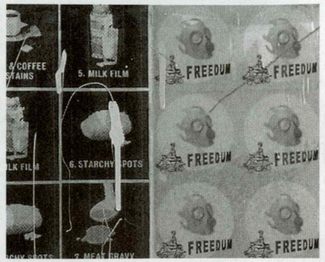
AF: A lot of the programmers I work with, they want it to be structured on all these levels: you get here then get here and then you win. So it's this competitive thing where you get points and you have a list of who's gotten the score. And I've always liked games to be more of a story. Where you maybe you don't necessarily get points, but you may get a part of an idea. Then the next level's another part of an idea. It is a sort of point system, but you're getting pieces of a puzzle, rather than pieces of a pie. And Sascha and I just really got into the idea of there never being an end. And there's never a way to win.

END

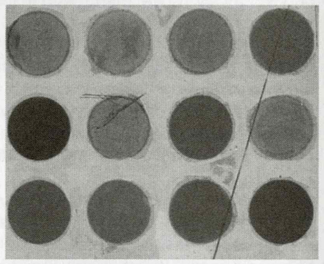
anti-pop!

loud paper interviews

bill barminski



left: ibm blue mickey
above, below and right:
details from various paintings



LP: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK?

BB: I some know people describe it as "neo-pop" or all kinds of other things. I think it of it as collaged media work. That's generally what it turns out to be.

LP: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE MONIKER "NEO-POP" OR POP IN GENERAL?

BB: I don't like it. I don't think it really fits because it's an easy handle to put on. If you look at it superficially, the work looks like pop but it's really the antithesis of it: anti-pop.

LP: HOW'S THAT?

BB: Pop artworks, like Andy Warhol's, reveled in those images. And they thought that they were in a way, beautiful. I use them in a different context.

The images are meant to be eye-candy that attracts you, but then you are supposed to read the subtext.

LP: SO, FOR EXAMPLE, IF I WAS LOOKING AT SOME OF THE FRED FLINTSTONE IMAGERY IN YOUR SHOW, WHAT WOULD THAT THEN READ AS?

BB: Well, I think the gas masks function in that way that I'm talking about. They are these cartoon pop images that are supposed to suck you in, like "oh, that's really... oh, what is that? It's a gas mask." So, this sinister reality is revealed.

Some of my other works incorporate embossed subtext that you don't see until you get up close and start really looking.

LP: WHAT ABOUT YOUR SHOW, FILTER? I WAS NOTICING ON SOME OF THE PAINTINGS THERE WERE PHOTOSHOPPED IMAGES.

BB: All the images are culled from media. A lot of it is nostalgic-looking-magazines from the fifties, sixties and seventies. I use Photoshop to alter and change a lot of the images. Then I print them out and then decoupage them to the wood surface on those paintings.

LP: HOW DO YOU FIND PEOPLE BUYING YOUR PAINTINGS? DO THEY BUY THEM FOR THE POP IMAGERY OR FOR THE WEIRD TENSION?

BB: You know, it's hard to say. I think it runs the gamut. Some people get stuff, and some people read a lot more into it than I intended or read it differently.

Sometimes people point out meanings that I didn't know were there. Maybe on a subconscious level I put the images together without really thinking about it.

LP: WHAT WOULD BE AN EXAMPLE OF THAT?

BB: In the image of the Barbie gas mask, above there I put this tire. An automobile tire. And I turned it horizontally, so that it's sitting above her head. The reviewer said that it's obvious by looking at this that "Barbie has been sainted." That it's a halo. I looked at it and thought, "you're right," but it didn't even occur to me when I was doing it, but for some reason I flipped the tire horizontally right above her head.

LP: WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE SEPTEMBER 11? YOUR SHOW, FILTER, WAS SOMEWHAT PRESCIENT GIVEN THAT IT OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 8.

BB: I'm not sure. In the middle of the gallery there was a big pile of dirt with a TV in it. After the bombings you would walk into the gallery and there was twenty-four hour news coverage coming out of that pile of dirt.

That piece became really creepy. And it had a totally different meaning than what was intended, although, not completely different, but it really took on it's own meaning.

I'm looking at my own work now and I am trying to identify the things that I do in my own work that are easy. Easy targets. I'm still working thorough what this is going to mean for my artwork, but what I think it is going to mean is that I'm going to have to work harder and try to be more thoughtful about what I do and try not to take easy targets.

I did all these paintings with a Coca-Cola bottle and I labeled it "crap." That's so easy now. And I realize that. I need to push to go to some other level. Otherwise is such a cartoon.

LP: DO YOU FEEL LIKE NOW THAT THERE ARE SOME SENSITIVE TOPICS THAT YOU FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE TO STAY AWAY FROM?

BB: I don't feel like there is anything that I have to stay away from. I'd never do that. I feel like a lot of my artwork is a skewing of popular culture and American culture in particular. I feel like I need to put some balance in it. It's a pot shot to say, "Oh, look at those stock brokers, they are just money grubbing." Yeah, but they are also people they are not cartoons. But I don't feel the need to stop criticizing mass culture for the way it denigrates language and the human soul.

LP: SO THE ARTIST OR THE CRITIC IS PART OF THE CONSUMPTION AS ANYTHING ELSE?

BB: Yes and no. This is why it gets back to what that show, Filter, was originally about. It was about the act of trying to separate yourself from it makes you become more apart of it. The gas masks epitomize it. You are trying to filter out, but at the same time you are putting on a Mickey Mouse mask. You can try to hide, but you are still a part of it. Also it is about how we take any kind of sinister thing and put a happy face on it.

That points to the complexities. I've been having arguments about American foreign policy. You have some people who are say that we are totally evil and the others say that we are the greatest. You know what... we are both of those at the same time. It is more complex than saying we are either good or evil.

LP: IT'S LIKE THE CLUSTER BOMBS AND THE FOOD AID PACKAGES LOOKING THE SAME.

BB: It's a complex thing. Everything is divided into shades of gray instead of what people want them to be: which is to fit into little pigeonholes.

I would like to work in more complex messages.

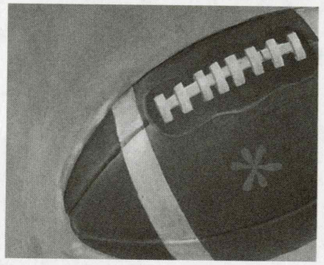
LP: TELL ME A BIT ABOUT THE ABSOLUT BILLBOARD YOU DID AND WORKING IN PUBLIC SPACE. DOES THAT FALL INTO YOU LIST OF THINGS YOU WOULD LIKE TO PURSUE?

BB: I'm not sure if pursing is the right word because these kind of things fall into your lap, or don't. So if someone asked me to do that again I certainly would entertain it. Some people criticized me because I do a lot of anti-advertising artwork, and then I did this ad. I would allow a certain amount of hypocrisy on my part, but on the other hand, I have to pay the bills. Anyway, I like to drink vodka, and sometimes I like to drink Absolut....

LP: AND THEY SPONSORED THE DRINKS FOR YOUR OPENING.

BB: Hey. That's right. A side benefit.

I have to admit that I got a bit of a charge out of seeing my name twenty feet tall on Sunset Boulevard. I would purposely drive by just to see it. They didn't alter my design at all. I designed it as a designer not an artist, so that it would be something unique, but also suit their needs.



LP: WHAT ABOUT DOING YOUR ANTI-COMMERCIALISM ADS IN PUBLIC SPACE?

BB: I'd love to do that. That's what I'd prefer to do. Art in public spaces... it's hard to get the wherewithal to get it to happen.

LP: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR UNDERGROUND COMIC, TEX HITLER: FASCIST GUN IN THE WEST, THAT YOU FIRST STARTED PUBLISHING IN TEXAS.

BB: I was in college and I realized that I wanted to be an artist, but at the time I was doing cartoons, but that was like "art." I started doing my own fanzines in Austin in the punk rock scene in the early eighties.

Being a student, not having much money, I started making these zines.... I used them to get into clubs. It was really my currency.

LP: I KNOW ABOUT THAT.

BB: Then you are at the bar and someone asks about a new issue and I would say, "Buy me a beer and I'll give you one." It became like dollar bills that I was making. It gave me a lot of incentive to keep making new ones. It was something I was doing for fun and then all of a sudden I started getting written about in the local paper and in Artforum. So, it was like, "Hey, maybe I should think about a career in the arts!"

LP: CHECKING IN ON YOUR FAVORITE PIECE OF ARCHITECTURE FOR THE ARCHITECTURE ZINE....

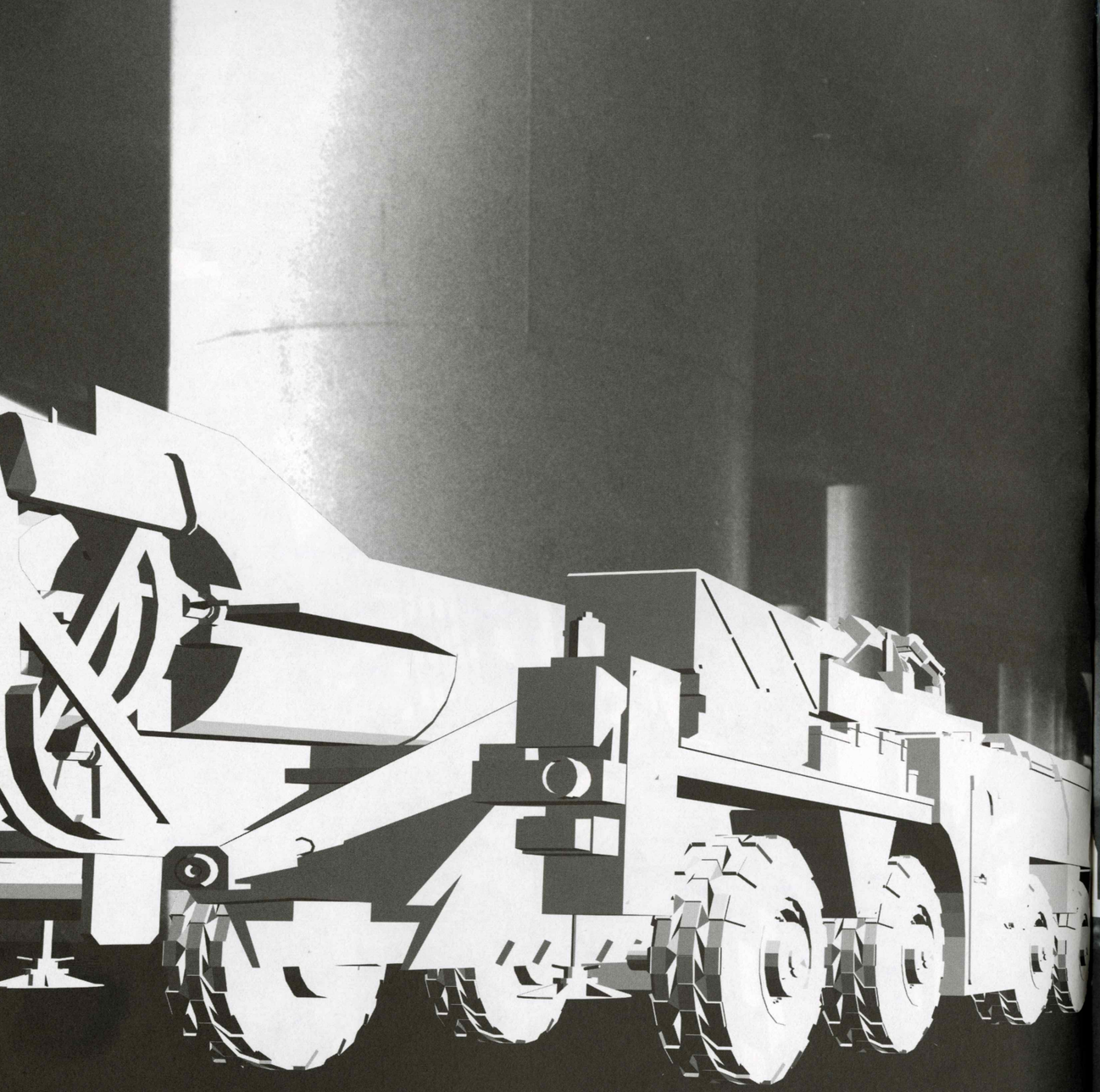
BB: My favorite piece of architecture? It's got to be a whole genre of things like Randy's Donuts. Themed roadside places like that. Or the dinosaurs out in the desert by Palm Springs. Then, there are the storefronts that look like cameras.

LP: THERE'S ONE ON WISHIRE...

BB: Yeah, I think it's an Indian restaurant now. END

(CHECK OUT BILL'S WORK AT WWW.PLASTICLAND.COM)

I don't really have a statement about these projects. They're about invasion and alienation. Images by: John B. Lin



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DRIVING WITH THE STRANGER

TEXT BY: JESSICA W. M. GIDAL

Images are from the documentary film,
"Casual Carpool in the San Francisco Bay Area"

A wide, flat, steely, blue, old convertible rolls up to the curb. The top is rolled down and the tanned, burly driver is smiling thickly through his shades. The woman in the passenger seat pushes the enormous door with some effort. She bounces out, holding the door open for a willing passenger to enter the gray-white vastness of the back seat. She looks at the aging Asian businessman, who is considering this scenario. His suit and tie are as immaculate as his neatly brushed strands of white hair. He holds his briefcase in front of his generous but solid middle with both hands, a mildly fearful pose. It is a sunny day. It is such a large car. I am next in line. The pretty young woman is waiting for me, her sundress fluttering above her knees. An awkward moment passes as he gazes blank-faced at his fate. He gets in. As the car starts up again, his round head is all that is visible of his body after the expanse of the massive trunk. The woman nestles into the front, closing the door with that satisfying 'lthwok' that only the heavy metal of old cars' doors can make. They are off towards the freeway, this mismatched trio, without a word, the breeze blowing through their hair.

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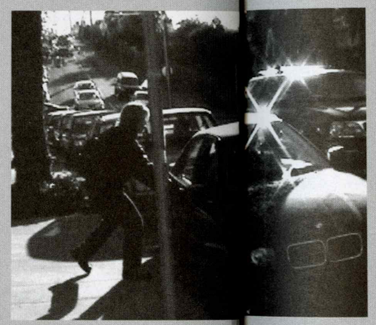
Random groupings of perfect strangers like this share their commute over bridges and through tunnels in the daily weekday haj from their East Bay homes to the Mecca of downtown San Francisco. Often, barely a word is spoken beyond the customary "Good Morning" at the pick-up and "Thank You" at the drop-off. Drivers let passengers invade the private temple of their cars, while passengers willingly forego the one-of-the-crowd anonymity of the bus or Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART). This is casual carpool, as it is known in the Bay Area, one of a few examples around the country of spontaneous carpooling with strangers. Passengers and drivers meet at understood locations (typically at bus and BART stations or near freeway entrances) for the big "win-win" of the morning commute: drivers bypass Bay Bridge traffic and tolls by meeting the requirements for the High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane, and passengers enjoy freedom from the fares and schedules of BART and the bus.

Casual carpool is flawless, sensible. In fact it is so flawless and sensible that it could never have been planned by any city planner or transportation wonk. This phenomenon is essentially an unorganized grassroots effort, organically emerging from the need to avoid the ever-more congested trip across the bridge. The official origins are disputed, though one cabbie claims to have invented it back in the 1970's when she would go "fishing" at bus stations for extra passengers to speed up her San Francisco round trips. This cabbie was one of several interviewees for my documentary film on casual carpool. Mid-way through the project, an article came out in the *San Francisco Chronicle* entitled "The Weird Side of Casual Carpooling" (Rubenstein, Steve. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 November 2000: The author described several notoriously strange drivers-the UFO Guy, the Psychic ("who insists he can provide intimate details about his passengers. The details are not often correct, although they are intimate"), the woman who likes to talk about stealing body parts and selling them on the black market, and the Dear Diarist who asks every passenger to sign the book and write comments. Granted, commuting with these folks at the helm would no doubt be memorable and even article-worthy. But the article sensationalized the wrong part of casual carpool. It isn't weird because you could get trapped with one of a few truly strange strangers, but it is weird because it is 2001 and 10,000 people every weekday trust each other not to be the reason they end up as a missing person on a milk carton.



The un-plannable ingredient of trust-the "fuel" of casual carpool-is the most baffling and fascinating aspect of this phenomenon. It defies logic and common sense at a time when it seems that the powers that be are working overtime to instill an increasing sense of fear and paranoia in all Americans. Thanks to mother's advice (never to talk to strangers, much less get in to their cars) - distrust typically reigns supreme when it comes to riding with strangers-just look at the general fear and disdain of hitchhiking or the implementation of bullet-proof taxi cages. But every day thousands of people leave this fear miraculously in the sink with the morning's breakfast dishes when it comes time to carpool casually in the Bay Area.

In no other place except for tightly knit communities and political movements do you see such acceptance and faith in other people. There are Bay Area ride boards and internet sites dedicated to finding carpools in one's own neighborhood, and yet, thousands of people would rather take a chance with the unknown, than to waste time and money on the roads. From where does the dazzling display of trust emerge? Here are some theories, gleaned from my interviews:

The Lefty Love Fest. This theory posits that trusting strangers to get you to downtown San Francisco in one piece is another bleeding heart display of how-Berkeley-can-you-be. It is as though hopping in to cars with strangers becomes a natural extension of "why can't we all just get along." Particularly in my interviews at the North Berkeley BART pick up spot, typical motivations for taking casual carpool were extremely politically correct-ranging from saving the environment to carpooling with Tibetans. This theory may hold true for some former radicals who now have money to cover their sky-high North Berkeley mortgages. However, it loses steam not only because there were self-proclaimed Republicans and Howard Stern listeners at this stop, but also because it exists elsewhere in places like Pittsburgh, not exactly the nation's group hug capital. In fact, it exists in Virginia as well, where passengers are called "slugs" and drivers are called "body-snatchers"-hardly the sensitive New Age way to engender a sense of trust.

The Adventure. This asserts that it is the curiosity that trumps trust. The risk is secondary to the "go west, young commuter" sense of adventure and the voyeuristic thrill of a free and acceptable opportunity to eavesdrop on your fellow neighbors. In addition to the famed Dear Diarist, I have discovered two people so far who document their carpool experiences daily. One interviewee delighted in participating in what he called a "social experiment" every day. He explained, "I feel like I'm getting away with something-it is too good to be true."

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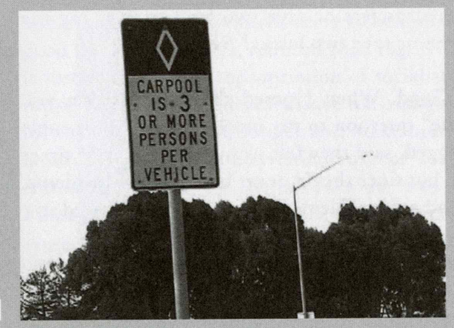


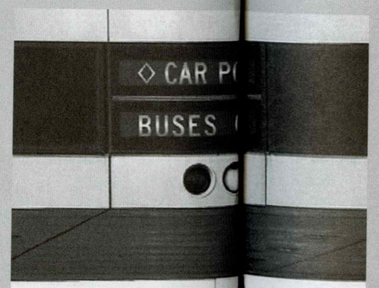
The Third Man. Since the driver is usually solo, the passengers include another random stranger in addition to oneself. Many mentioned the accountability of this third person as a major factor contributing to their sense of safety. In the same vein, there are passengers who refuse to get into two-seaters or be the "third" in a car that already has two people when it pulls up to the passenger line. In theory, these strategies diminish the chances of passenger abduction and driver hijacking.

The Deal. Perhaps it the all-American quest for a bargain that makes these people into all-trusting commuters. Risk my life with strangers or save two bucks? Risk my life with strangers or save two bucks? Save two bucks.

So Far So Good. When I posed the "what makes you think it's safe" question to my interviewees, most people simply shrugged, said they felt strange the first few times they tried it, but since they'd never heard of any incidents, and never had any problems themselves, they trusted it.

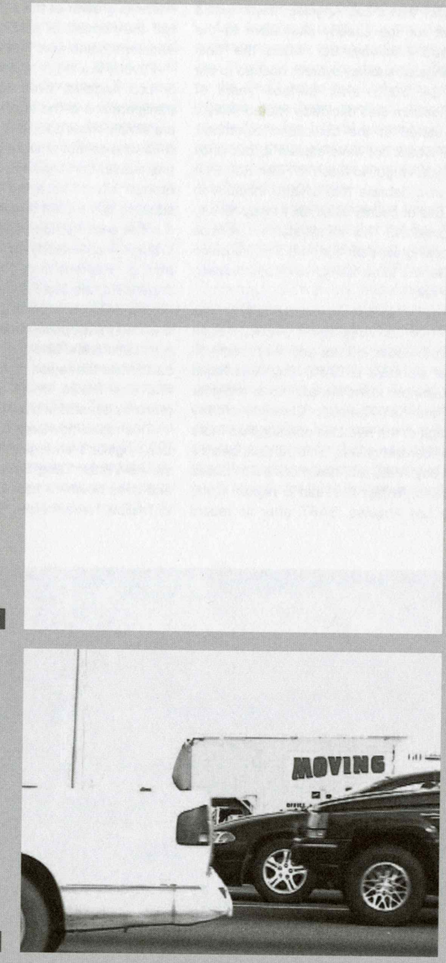
A Volvo and a Gentleman. Only a few people pointed to demographics as a factor of trust in casual carpool: it is, as one interviewee described it, "gentleman's hitchhiking." At its extreme, well-dressed drivers in nice cars from the hills who can afford to park in the City pick up people in the flats. People wear office-ready clothing and typically listen to National Public Radio's Morning Edition (and the scattered Howard Stern listeners reportedly obtain permission first so as not to offend). There is a civility required in the understood etiquette between driver and passenger. No-nos include food, drinks, smoking, perfume, cell phone calls, backseat driving (unless they've missed their exit), stopping for gas or running errands with passengers. Moreover, like good children, passengers typically speak only when spoken to by the driver. Taking it one step further, one passenger posited that it may not ever be appropriate for the backseat passenger to talk, even when addressed-so, there are even stirrings of an ignored backseat passenger revolution in the civil society that is casual carpool.

Even the *Chronicle* article touched on the issue of demographics. One interviewee quoted in the article said, while apparently tugging on his beret, "This is not hitchhiking, but an arrangement of mutual convenience between people of similar class, background and outlook." The female cabbie's story concurs; she said people trusted her because she was a petite friendly woman (the male drivers, envious of her speedy city trips, tried her technique to much less success because of their



"unpolished" appearance). According to my interviews, the worst that had ever happened in a car consisted of a bumpy ride, political disagreements, and body odor. Benign though these are, I couldn't help but wonder if the widespread trust would be shattered if there were a major "incident," e.g. a mugging, abduction, hijacking, hold-up, etc. I feared my documentary process would make people reconsider their lemming-like behavior. I feared the transit authorities would get wind of my documentary and maliciously plan to thwart casual carpool by staging an incident, so that they could "drive" customers back to their businesses. I think, however, that even if a casual carpool incident or two made it in the Bay Area news, the overriding convenience and benefits of this kinder, gentler, and stranger commute would jump-start it again after a brief lull.

I remain in awe of the unusual demonstration of trust, and the blasé attitude towards this weekday morning life-or-death gamble. While most of the motivations were primarily self-serving and capitalistic, could it be that underneath all of the trust and cooperation are the seeds of socialism? That is, while its users do gain personally from the exchange, it could be argued that casual carpool is inherently anti-capitalist because no one actually profits and, furthermore, the conservation of resources by the



voluntary acts of individuals serve to benefit the common good (fewer fossil fuels, reduced road rage). Or perhaps it is just an unwitting appropriation of socialist behavior to propel capitalistic tendencies (save toll and gas money, get to work faster to work longer and make more money). It is amusing that this convenient use of socialism-helps transport people to their desks in San Francisco's Financial district-the very heart of capitalism in the symbol of individual freedom: the car. END

text by: daniel gildea

transit

You might expect that a Los Angeles mayor would bask in the credit for the speedy alternative to the clogged Hollywood Freeway, but when the final segment of Los Angeles subway system opened to the public on June 24, 2000, after thirteen years of construction, enthusiasm was decidedly muted. Mayor Richard Riordan stated at the dedication ceremony, "quite honestly, I would not have started it, but once you've started it, you've got to finish it." The Red Line is seen as such of a debacle that a voter initiative in 1998 banned the use of county sales tax money for any future subway projects. This dissatisfaction in Los Angeles is in surprising contrast with the San Francisco Bay Area, which seems to be falling over itself drawing up plans for more rail.

From the perspective of San Francisco Bay Area, it is easy to look down on Los Angeles as the city whose love affair with automobile makes any investment in transit futile. After all, there is BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), whose rush-hour trains are packed to the gills. Los Angeles, as the *San Francisco* Chronicle snidely noted in its coverage of the Red Line opening, has more automobiles than licensed drivers. This statistic bears a second look: the Bay Area, too, has more automobiles than licensed drivers. In fact the ratio is higher in the Bay Area than in Los Angeles. BART, after its record ridership growth of the past two years, still carries only half the number of passengers per route mile of Los Angeles's brand new Red Line.

Poverty is a major reason that transit ridership is high in Los Angeles, even when the concept of public transportation is the stuff of Hollywood highjinx. There are simply more people in Los Angeles than in the Bay Area who cannot afford a car. Despite the fact that getting around Los Angeles without a car can be a grueling ordeal, many have no choice. Compounding the situation is the 1994 requirement that one must provide a social security number to obtain a California Driver's License, inadvertently excluding illegal immigrants from driving. Representing the interests of the transit-dependent, the Bus Riders Union sued the Los Angeles County MTA. The union posited that the county's rail-oriented transit policy was racist. Bus service, on which poor Latinos and blacks depend, had been drastically cut back while the region spent billions on rail construction. The Bus Riders Union argued that rail construction primarily benefits white suburbanites.

This claim, however, is belied by a look at the map: Los Angeles's emerging light rail and subway network serves Watts, Long Beach, Compton, and Inglewood, and goes nowhere near Santa Monica, Woodland Hills or Malibu. Nevertheless, for Los Angeles to address its smog and steadily worsening congestion, those who drive must be provided with an attractive alternative. Even Los Angeles's congested freeways are faster and more convenient than local bus service for anyone who has a choice.

Back up in the Bay Area bus service in urban areas has suffered even as BART built extensions to far-flung suburban. AC Transit (Alameda county's surface bus system) forced to cut much of its night and weekend service; San Francisco's Muni, on the other hand, has simply failed to get its scheduled buses out on the street. As in many cities across the nation, much of the blame lies in the cutbacks in federal operating subsidies. The attitude in Washington throughout the Clinton administration was that while the federal government will help cities with large construction projects that they might not be able to afford on their own, day-to-day operations should not be a federal responsibility. The result has been billions of dollars spent on the least cost-effective ways of moving people. The BART extension to the San Francisco Airport, for example, will cost at least $1.5 billion, while bringing, according the BART's 1995 environmental impact report, the reduction in travel time between downtown San Francisco and the airport to precisely zero minutes.

Perhaps the most important factor in whether transit is successful is the density and design of the urban area it serves. While Bay Area residents like to feel superior to automotive sprawl of Los Angeles, the fact is that is both northern and southern California have many types of neighborhoods, with the primary factor in an area's urban form being the period in which it was developed. Areas that were built before automobile ownership became widespread are more densely populated; both because of taller buildings and because of less space devoted to parking and roads. Not only does higher population density provide more potential transit riders per square mile; it makes walking to and waiting at transit stops more pleasant. Postwar suburban cities put pedestrians between eight lane roads of fast-moving vehicles on one side and acres of desolate parking lots on the other.

A major reason that the Red Line's ridership is as high as it is that it serves the densely populated tenements of Westlake as well as the 1920's pedestrian-oriented commercial district of Hollywood Boulevard. San Francisco's nineteenth century density is reflected in Muni's high ridership statistics, while sprawling Silicon Valley's transit ridership is lower than LA's. Transportation planners understand the connection between land use and transit, which is why two ridership figures were prepared for the proposed San Jose BART extension: one for current land use patterns, and another assuming dense development clustered around stations. Development so dense, in fact, that it would require tripling the office space of downtown San Jose, something never envisioned by San Jose's city planning officials or permitted by the city's zoning documents.

Although planners are aware of the connection between land use and transportation, there is a fundamental disconnect between the two in the way the government institutions are structured. Transportation agencies such as have no authority over zoning decisions, which are made by local city governments. The ballot measure authorizing BART to San Jose was sold to the voters on the basis of the 78,000 daily riders projected with massive development around stations, but nothing in the measure itself brings such development closer to being allowed by zoning laws. Indeed, any such plans would probably lead to voter revolt. Entire neighborhoods of historic single family houses would have to be leveled and replaced with high rise offices. This situation closely parallels the history of the Los Angeles Red Line the feasibility studies in Los Angeles promised 297,000 daily riders, based on massive development around stations. The city of Los Angeles never took any steps to make such development legal, and today the 17-mile Red Line carries 135,000 daily passengers.

Los Angeles is currently is the process of re-evaluating its long-range transportation plan in an effort to see how it can do more for less cash. Plans for extensions to the Red Line to the Mid Cities area and East Los Angeles have been shelved, despite funding agreements from the federal government. Surface light rail options is under evaluation and a relatively inexpensive busway is in planning for an unlikely place in the sprawl, the San Fernando Valley.

The popular conception that transit in Los Angeles is a futile proposition, and that the Bay Area is fundamentally different, does not hold up under scrutiny. Plans for massive expansion of the BART system in the Bay Area starkly contrast with Los Angeles attempts to pinch and save. Why has no such shift in public perception or public policy taken place in the Bay Area? One answer may be that they are simply behind the curve, and that twenty years from now, when BART has sucked up all transportation funding in the Bay Area, it we will be in the same position. A more complete answer requires a diffrent question: how important is it to provide effective transportation for those who cannot drive given that the infrastructure currently planned is so expensive that it will not pay for itself for generations? END

Office of Mobile Design text by: jennifer siegal

Portable House: *ADAPTABILITY*

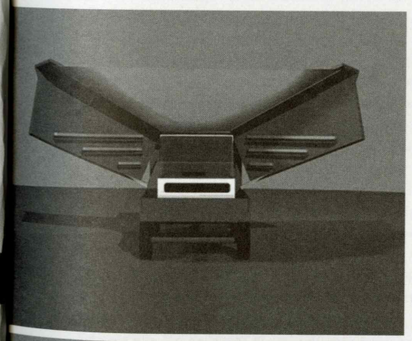
Harkening back to original prehistoric models of shelter, which were easily manipulated to accommodate innumerable variables and conditions, the Portable House adapts, relocates and reorients itself to an ever-changing environment. It offers an eco-sensitive and economical alternative to the increasingly expensive permanent structures that constitute many of today's housing options. The Portable House questions preconceived notions of the trailer home and trailer park. It creates an entirely new option for those with disposable income but insufficient resources for entering the conventional housing market.

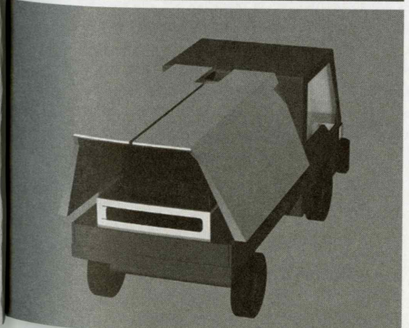
The Portable House's mobility, the way it moves across and rests lightly upon the landscape, provides a provocative counterpoint to the status quo housing model. Likewise, it offers flexibility in the socio-dynamics of everyday living, including expandable/contractible spaces and flexibility in grouping units together to create gardens, courtyards, side yards. Whether momentarily positioned in the open landscape, briefly located in an urban space, or situated for a more lengthy stay, the Portable House accommodates a wide range of housing needs and functions.

web http://www.designmobile.com

portable house collage

below and left:
vending kiosks





Mobile Event City: *COMMUNITY*

The Mobile Event City provides an overall upgrade of event facilities for a socially conscious event-planning firm that creates multi-day outdoor charity events in support of AIDS, breast cancer, world hunger, and like causes. The goal is to provide structures for their nightly encampments, that are easily relocatable, adaptable to varying site conditions, climate controlled, clean, well-lit, and visually striking - and that help engender intimate social interaction.

Four possible master plan schemes assemble the campsite components into a four-tiered hierarchy, which can then be organized either around a central gathering space ('Town Square'), along a linear corridor ('Main Street'), or in a combination thereof.

Individual campsite elements, such as Medical Services, Outreach (marketing), Vending Kiosks and the 'Remembrance Place' use existing truck types as points of departure, then hybridize them with tensile fabric structures. These compact, self-contained mobile structures are weather resistant, hygienic, and easy to deploy and relocate. As they unfold, slide open, pivot and pull apart to expand their floor areas, their fabric components take shape to form roofs, walls and overhangs, transforming their host vehicles into unique, wondrous building/machines.

Vending Kiosk
To facilitate intimate social interaction, the diminutive Vending Kiosks locate/relocate throughout the campsite, offering a variety of 'comfort foods.' Two wing-like structures envelop food preparation and storage equipment on the truck bed. When open for business, these wings spread out, unfolding a fabric canopy that instantly creates sheltered gathering space and becomes a recognizable iconographic presence in the camp landscape. Condiments, utensils or products for sale are displayed on shelves along the wings' interiors.

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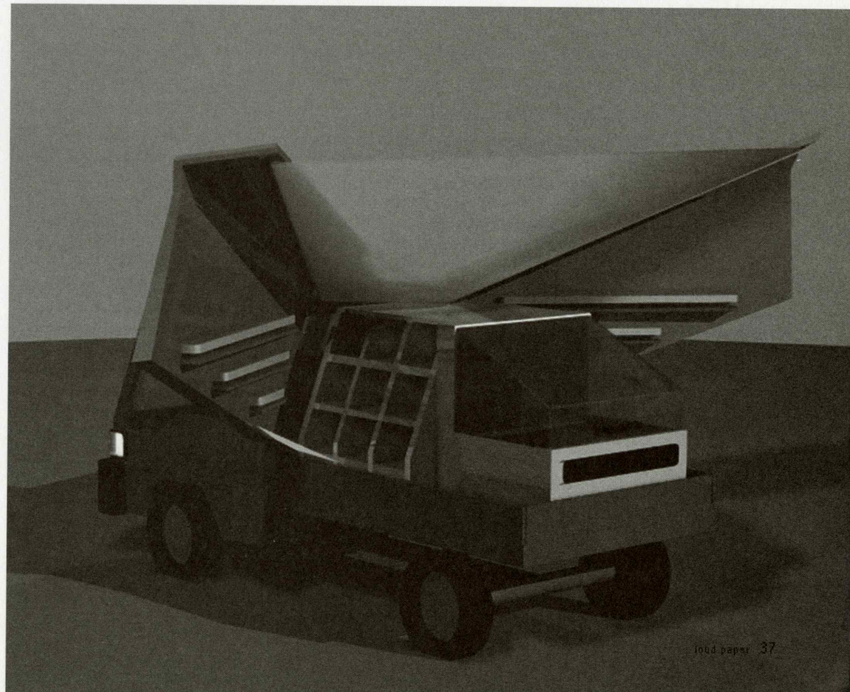

kiosk collage

"To take roots to me means cutting off avenues of escape, avenues of communication with the rest of the world. So that against the wish for repose, there is an impulse to remain mobile, fluid, to change surroundings."
– Anais Nin from the Diary of Anais Nin Vol. V.

a life in transit

I dream of my escape. From the center of Stewart Elementary's baseball field, our physical education coach waves me farther into the outfield with exaggerated hand movements. "More left," he yells. "Further back." Its a position that may get a lot of action on SportCenter, but the fifth grade recess outfield grants me a cherished time-out. With the temperature topping one hundred degrees, my goal is to move as little as possible. If only I had a pocket-sized bedroom I could snap together like a plastic Playskool shed. A refuge I could bring with me anywhere.

There is an entire culture of people who must have had the same dream: a group for whom the need to be home is pressing; yet the thought of a Super Wal-Mart cul-de-sac community is a nightmare. A mobile home should be, by definition, mobile. If mobility involves cutting your house in half, removing its contents like pieces in a dollhouse, and propping it up on a semi truck with a "CAUTION WIDE LOAD" sign, how mobile is it? What we refer to as "Mobile Homes" in America should be renamed Manufactured Homes or even Non-Permanent Homes. The mobile homes I'm interested in are truly mobile. They allow owners to change their view given a stretch of road and an afternoon.

"When you live in a RV, you're always home," writes a woman who claims her recreational vehicle as her permanent residence. With more amenities than some apartments, the plushest of recreational vehicles can include separate living, dining, bathing and sleeping areas, a washer and dryer, central heat and air, a refrigerator and even satellite television. However well-equipped, space remains a rare commodity in motor homes. "Full-timers" trade extras like pottery dishes for plastic-ware and limit their wardrobe to a few sets of casual wear and one dress outfit.

Mobile living doesn't necessitate constant transit. Rest stops, abandoned roads and friend's backyards can provide free short-term breaks from the highway. For longer stationary periods, many campgrounds offer RV-friendly lots for around ten dollars a night. Most offer water and gas hookups for an extra charge and more nature than any strip mall lined sub-division will ever have it's commitment-phobic's American dream.

Some mobile travelers have embraced the "other" two-thirds of our earth as a great personal oasis, hugging the earth's coastline in houseboats. With only a dangling connection to the sea bottom, a houseboat is moving even when it appears to be still. It can provide a sense of perpetual motion, with the faithful promise of a dock each morning. Houseboats became popular in France in the late 1920s. Anais Nin spent some of her most creative years in her houseboat on the Seine. In America, houseboats had their heyday among artists in the 1950s, before city code regulations drove up costs.

The floating home can still be an inexpensive alternative to permanent housing. Of the one hundred or so houseboats in Mississippi River's Latsch Island Community, twenty-five are occupied by live-aboard residents, and many of these floating homes have been assembled by their owners using construction site discards, old car motors, and barrels for flotation.

The seventy-nineth Street Boat Basin in New York City is home to 120 year-round residents. One Boat Basin dweller rotates each year between working as a sound engineer at a large radio production company and sailing the eastern seaboard. Others take advantage of Manhattan's rich job market, working as temps and saving just enough money for the next sea voyage. Not exactly the "Sex in the City" Manhattan lifestyle.

Suped up RVs and constantly mobile houseboats can be just as costly as an apartment thus a full kitchen and bathroom aren't always necessary. Just ask the troupe of Volkswagen owners who maintain a website dedicated to living out of their cars. Articles give lessons on using an automobile's engine for cooking. Baking times are given in miles instead of hours. Another site provides tips on how to insulate a car for extreme weather conditions, the best places to park, and how to handle middle of the night police disturbances. In Brooklyn's Williamsburg, a long bearded thirty-something man lives in his International Scout, parking it at night alongside defunct factory buildings bordering the East River. The back of his hipster SUV is just big enough for a futon bed, a wooden container to store belongings and a metal rod for clothes.

If what you own really does own you, how liberating it must be to possess so little you don't need moving boxes or a friend's pickup to relocate. Just think how much pleasure must come from seeing the first Jack in the Box appear out of a one hundred mile stretch, discovering a marina's vending machine, or surrendering to the cozy freshness of the All-Night Laundromat on a Brooklyn winter night. Such is the joy of a life in transit. END

text by: britta anne steiner

landscape + language

text by: krystal chang

images by: cynthia connolly

In 1949, Ithaca, New York, a story that Vladimir Nabokov wrote in Paris and destroyed shortly after his arrival in America began to haunt him again. In the original version, written in Russian, the man was a Central European, the anonymous nymphet was French, and the loci were Paris and Provence. It was the transposition to America and into English that gave birth to that most famous and controversial works of literature, Lolita. In an afterword written a year later, Nabokov responded to the controversy: **"Another charge which some readers have made is that Lolita is anti-American. This is something that pains me considerably more than the idiotic accusation of immorality. Considerations of depth and perspective (a suburban lawn, a mountain meadow) led me to build a number of North American sets."** It is no accident that the framework Nabokov chose for this story was that most quintessential of American experiences: the road trip. An entire America is hidden inside Lolita; the landscape and the language are drawn out through a stunning, archetypical example of the road trip genre, with all the traditional tropes: the descriptions of small towns, deserts, and highways; the running, the searching and the tragic end.

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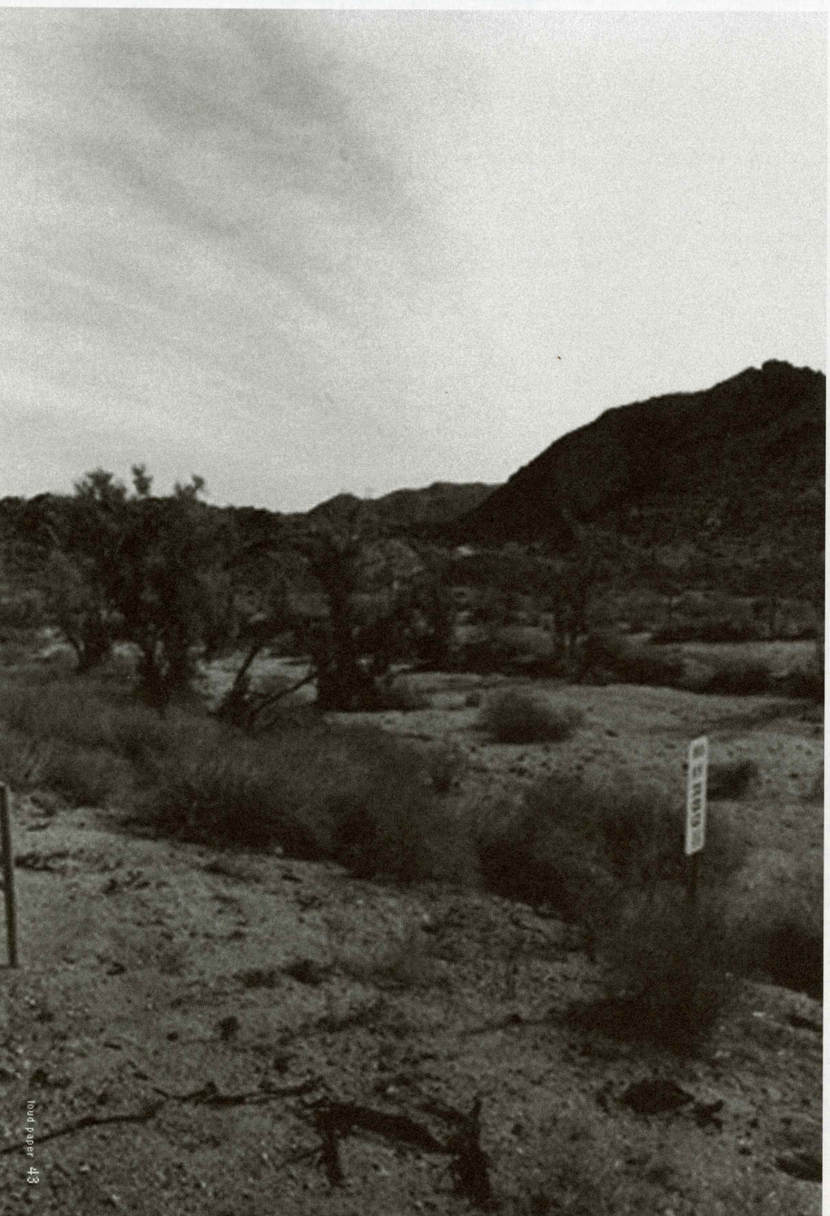
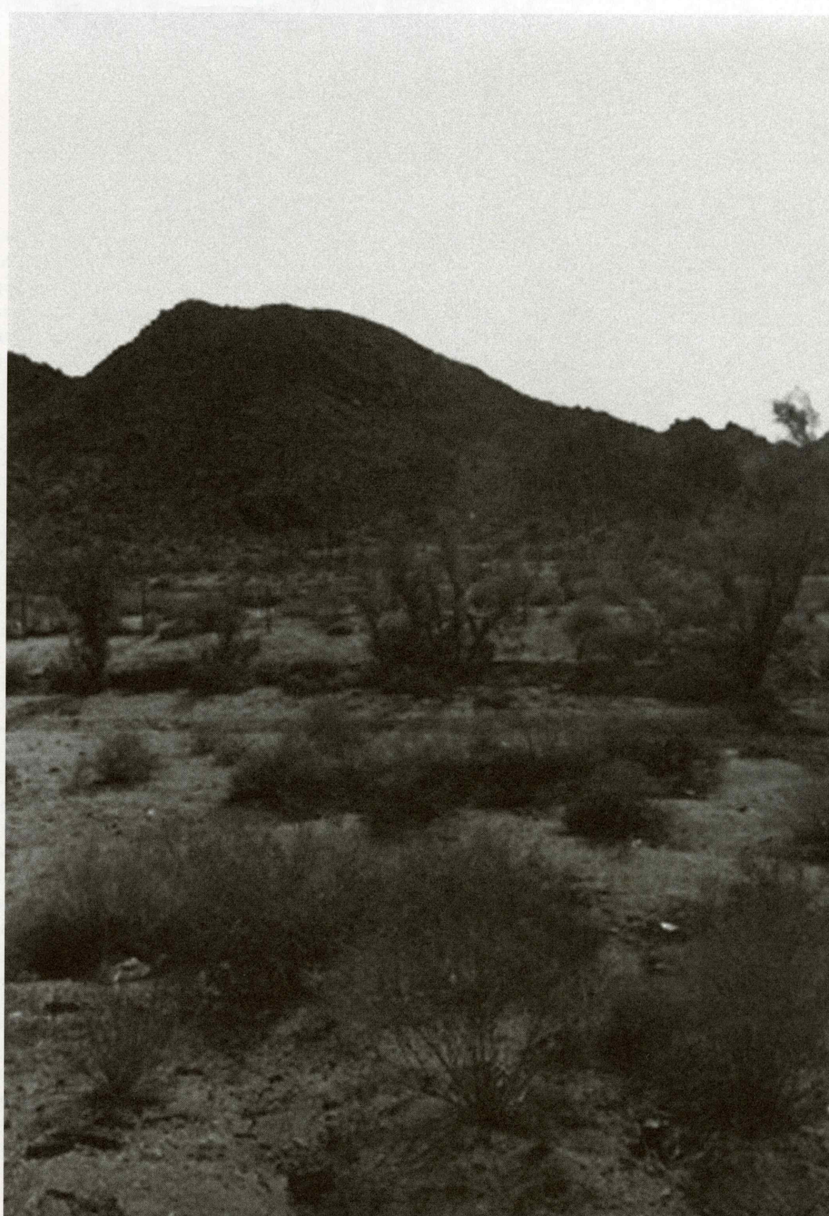
Humbert Humbert, newly widowed after Charlotte Haze's death, picks up his step-daughter Dolores Haze from summer camp and they commence a yearlong tour across the United States, beginning **"with a series of wiggles and whorls in New England, then meandered south, up and down, east and west; dipped deep into ce** *qu'on appelle* **Dixieland, avoided Florida because the Farlows were there, veered west, zigzagged through corn belts and cotton belts... crossed and re-crossed the Rockies, straggled through southern deserts where we wintered; reached the Pacific, turned north through the pale lilac fluff of flowering shrubs along forest roads; almost reached the Canadian border... and finally returned to the fold of the East..."** On a first reading, Lolita usually yields only the relationship between a pedophiliac, middle-aged man and his nymphet. More often than not, the cover of the book portrays some artist's interpretation of Lolita: young and innocent, or wily and seductive. Nabokov himself had much more in mind than that simplistic formula; the setting is as important as the characters. After reviewing the proposed designs for Putnam's 1958 hardcover edition of Lolita, he made the following statement in a letter to the publisher: **"I want pure colors, melting clouds, accurately drawn details, a sunburst above a receding road with the light reflected in furrows and ruts after rain. And no girls."**

The traditional motivations for a road trip are numerous but repetitive: the road trip as rite-of-passage, as a fugitive run, as a search for the "real" land; to rebel, to discover, to escape... but never to reach a destination. For Humbert to maintain such a socially taboo relationship, he must avoid the familiar by keeping in motion. But Humbert transforms "running away" into "looking for: playing a literal game of hide-and-seek across America. "By putting the geography of the United States into motion," *he writes,* "I did my best for hours on end to give her the impression of 'going places,' of rolling on to some definite destination, to some unusual delight. I have never seen such smooth amiable roads as those that now radiated before us, across the crazy quilt of forty-eight states. Voraciously we consumed those long highways, in rapt silence we glided over their glossy black dance floors." *They play the tourist, visiting the world's largest stalagmite, Lincoln's log cabin, monuments, a collection of European hotel picture postcards, scenic drives, a collection of homemade sculptures, villas, fish hatcheries, cliff dwellings. From the prehistoric to the contemporary, from the grand to the ludicrous, the American landscape is a necessary distraction. Whether a spectacular natural wonder or a private collections of curiosities, what they see is of no significance:* "as likely as not Lo would feign gagging as soon as we got to it." *Each spectacle could replace any other; what matters is the anticipation, the expectancy of desire. They see America but do not possess it; the land remains elusive and therefore still desirable. As long as they remain in motion, there is the possibility of a happy ending for Humbert, or at least a delay of the inevitable.*





In America, Baudrillard writes of the country as a European, constantly contrasting the two opposing states of mind: "We are a culture of intimacy which produces manners and affectation; they have a democratic culture of space." *For Baudrillard, freedom in America is spatial and mobile, but leads to desert and nothingness. Space gives both physical and moral latitude. However, the negation of timeless space could also be seen as a forgiveness for the past. There is a peculiar charm in being in transit, in between places, in no place. Time stalls between the nostalgia of the past and the promise of the future, with no present and no worries.*

Humbert and Lolita persist in a perpetual now, changing settings but not circumstances. Such is the nature of Baudrillard's holographic America where you can take "the tiniest little place in the desert... and you have the whole of the US-South, North, East, or West." *The country becomes a series of repetitions of difference. Humbert and Lolita become so familiar with the integral components of the American road: the motels, the hitchhikers, the diners and gas stations, that they become capitalized types, the same in every place.*

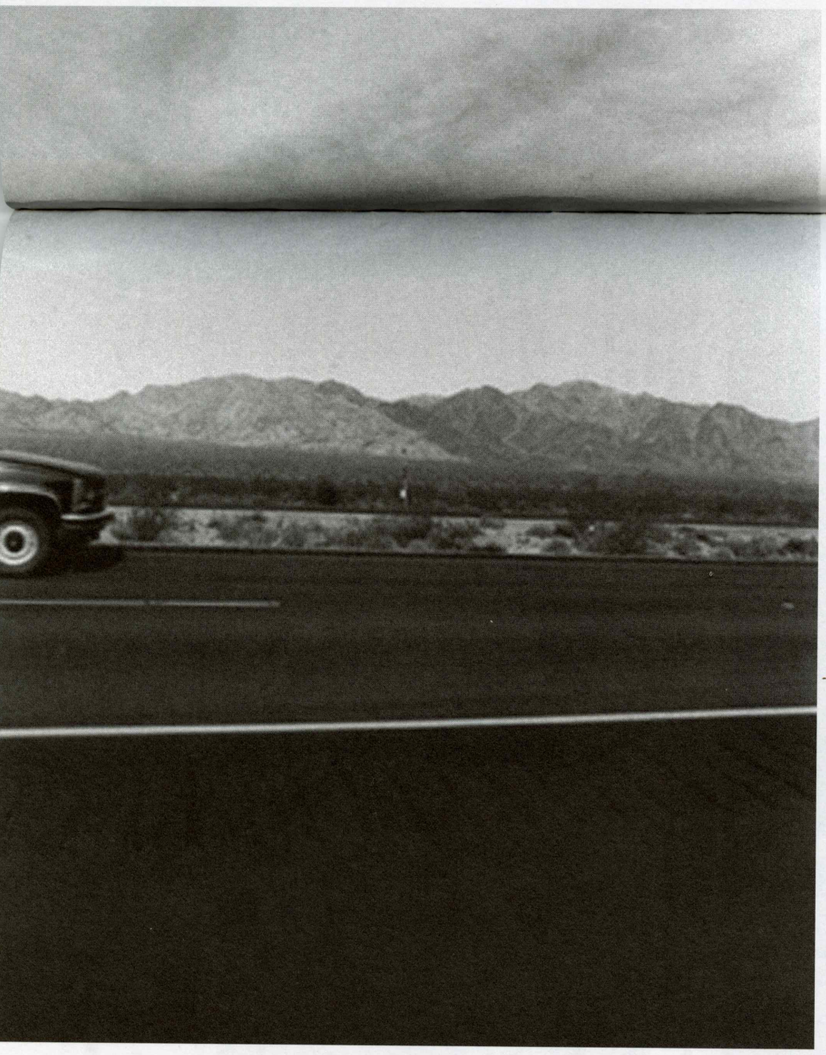
However, places do retain an importance as locations of emotional significance. Humbert methodically records their arguments by specific site: "at Lacework Cabins, Virginia; on Park Avenue, Little Rock, near a school; on Milner Pass, 10,759 feet high, in Colorado; at the corner of Seventh Street and Central Avenue in Phoenix Arizona; on Third Street, Los Angeles..." *Likewise, he searches for the typical places in which to enact his sexual fantasies: the secluded lane, the Kingdom by the Sea. Eventually, places become deterministic, foreshadowing and not just recording events.* "I felt instinctively that toilets-as also telephones-happened to be, for reasons unfathomable, the points where my destiny was liable to catch." These "fateful objects" *are literally and figuratively signs. The physical landscape is transformed into an emotional landscape; they remember the country through dog-eared tour book and marked-up maps, which become subjectiveaccounts of places visited.*

Nabokov writes not only with the perspective of a European, but also the authority of one who has seen the details of America missed by Americans. During summers spent butterfly-hunting with his wife, Nabokov visited remote locations around the country. **"The locality labels pinned under these butterflies will be a boon to some twenty-first century scholar with a taste for recondite biography. It was at such of our headquarters as Telluride, Colorado; Afton, Wyoming; Portal, Arizona; and Ashland, Oregon, that Lolita was energetically resumed in the evenings or on cloudy days."** The mountain trail where Humbert Humbert reaches his last epiphany is where Nabokov caught the first known female of the species *Lycaeides sublivens Nabokov*.

Humbert describes the landscape as a cultured European, unlike Lo's vulgar American: **"A great user of roadside facilities, my unfastidious Lo would be charmed by toilet signs-Guys-Gals, John-Jane, Jack-Jill and even Buck's-Doe's; while lost in an artist's dream, I would stare at the honest brightness of the gasoline paraphernalia against the splendid green of oaks, or at a distant hill scrambling out-scarred but still untamed-from the wilderness of agriculture that was trying to swallow it."** What each is attracted by points up the dichotomy of a landscape that is both Romantic and Post-Industrial. But what Humbert recognizes is the ambiguity-and harmony-between the natural and the man-made. Ironically, **"the lyrical, epic, tragic, but never Arcadian American wilds"** remind Humbert of Europe; he recognizes the American landscape through the Old Master landscapes of his youth, seeing Claude Lorrain clouds or an El Greco horizon in Kansas.

"Americans have transformed all places," he writes, "even cities, into desert." Space is made infinite by the destruction of the center, in turn creating a true fictional space, the perfect setting for an **"orgy of indifference, disconnection, exhibition, circulation."** The essence of Baudrillard's America is circulation: traffic flows, money flows, production and consumption cycle incessantly. The automobile is a prime mover in this circulation system. A private car is freedom; driving is, according to Baudrillard, a **"new experience of space, and, at the same time, a new experience of the whole social system."** However, each encounter that Humbert and Lolita make on the road is fraught with paranoia. The strangers around them serve to tighten their community of two. So the introduction of Clare Quilty is a shock–a seemingly minor character, it turns out that he was a prime mover, if only identified through his car, the Aztec Red Convertible. The car is a reflection of character, but can also assume a presence. In Lolita, Humbert drives his dead wife's blue sedan, the **"old Haze bus,"** to the end.

The system of transportation is an agreement between strangers, a modern day social contract with very real consequences. Humbert's last, self-destructive act goes against the agreed compact of Baudrillard's **"collective propulsion": "The road now stretched across open country, and it occurred to me-not by way of a protest, not as a symbol, or anything like that, but merely as a novel experience-that since I had disregarded all laws of humanity, I might as well disregard the rules of traffic. So I crossed to the left side of the highway and checked the feeling, and the feeling was good. It was a pleasant diaphragmal melting, with elements of diffused tactility, all this enhanced by the thought that nothing could be nearer to the elimination of basic physical laws than deliberately driving on the wrong side of the road."**



Humbert and Lolita's first trip, the "Joyride," *ends back in the East; their second trip cross-country is ominous. The beginning is abrupt, as it is a set-up from the start for Lolita to leave him for their pursuer, Quilty. Unlike the serendipitous first journey, Lolita marks the map with lipstick, insisting that they hit certain points at certain times. The co-ordinates of place are used to co-ordinate escape. The landscape reflects the changing dynamics; they are plagued by thunderstorms, or, Humbert wonders, is it only the storm of being followed? The map is always already an instrument of power, not innocence. Humbert has vague plans to go to Mexico, but realizes the hopelessness:* "We would spin on to California, to the Mexican border, to mythical bays, saguaro deserts, fatamorganas... Why did I hope we would be happy abroad? A change of environment is the traditional fallacy upon which doomed loves, and lungs, rely." *After she escapes, he takes to the road in search of her, each trip becoming more truncated and more desperate.*

Although the road trip is American by virtue of space, it is ultimately self-defeating by virtue of geography; it is by nature a temporary state of affairs. The hoped-for discovery is simply nothingness. Humbert gives a beautiful, defenseless apology: "We had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing. And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night-every night, every night-the moment I feigned sleep." *But if the characters remain untouched and untouchable, so does the land. America stays elusive for both Humbert and Nabokov. Both evince a belief in the country, despite, or because, it remains out of grasp; if it cannot be held, it must be believed. Nabokov ends his afterword with the lament of the English language as still foreign, but the task which he presented himself with –* "the task of inventing America" *– he completed. The elusiveness of America may simply be an effect of the blurred perception of speed and a whole, if not steady, view.* END

Social Transit

Text and Images By:
Lex Bhagat

Columbus Circle. 59th Street and Broadway. New York City. Perhaps the only roundabout in the Borough of Manhattan. Overseen by the gaze of Christophero, "The First Italian-American," who spoke of a round world - round, like this circular roadway. An exceptional space, it conducts the passage from one distinct civic realm to another: from the workaday world of Midtown, to the bourgeois domestic blocks of the Upper West Side. It can appear confusing; this interconnection of too many avenues with a major street, but it has permission to be confusing. The wide entrance to the Central Park offers ample resting space, and essential vista, for reorientation. This circle is a true gateway: a valve.

"I was looking for a place where everyone could come together and that was it- 59th Street and Broadway," says Ray Simmons, Director of Operation Prison Gap. Each weekend his organization transforms Columbus Circle, seizing upon its predisposition to function as a gateway. The Circle is used as the dispatch point for more than forty buses, which run weekly from New York City to various facilities in the New York State prison archipelago. This is quite in keeping with the Columbus Circle's traditional role as an internal valve. Operation Prison Gap allows for non-driving urbanites to cover hundreds of miles to see loved ones. The frantic pace of prison construction over the past three decades resulted in a network of high-security housing projects, which, albeit separated by dozens or even hundreds of miles, are an integral part of the fabric of the metropolis.

Columbus Circle is a strange sort of spatial hyperlink, for journey to the abstract space of an abstract element of the city. Moving north along the coursing Hudson River. Past billions of years old rounded hills of Catskills, across clay flats and sand flats, to the younger, pointed Adirondacks - is it really travel? Through valleys cultivated for ten thousand years by the Five Nations. The buses branch: some head east towards Lake Erie, through the old sea level "Gateway to the West," to Auburn or Cayuga, or beyond. They soldier on to Niagara Falls in the land of the Tuscarora. Some head north, scaling and crossing Adirondack foothills, with their precious high catches of water - to Dannemora, the town built, medieval, in the shadow of a wall, where the sharpshooters will always have the best view of Lake Champlain. Or further, to the frigid winds of the St. Lawrence Plain, to Malone and her three sets of homogeneous boxes- her "prison cluster." What would we call this motion, where a body leaves New York City and arrives strangely within that same New York City?

The ghetto environ spreads across the landscape: equivalent to the seamless and homogeneous passage made by the business flyer from hotel to rental car to airport to office.

The Columbus Circle dispatch is proof that actual people with actual social needs can form a particular space and that such meaningful locations are expressions of collective will. A self-organized system, the dispatch bears much resemblance to a third-world bus depot. Nothing is set in stone, and while it may appear quite chaotic, the chaos is just that: appearance. The order is unwritten: fluid and human.

Fully encumbered with several bags and a small daughter, a young mother emerges from a taxicab. In a self-organized space, each body takes space and makes openings momentarily, for those bodies around it. Her visible urgency creates an opening around her path through the densely packed sidewalk. Momentary passages are created, not only around the running mother, but also for the hawkers who pace back and forth, selling batteries, socks, hats and gloves. There is a steady stream of theatergoers crossing the space. They are bound for stages a few blocks away. Some are knowing, curious or oblivious to the manifest purpose around them.

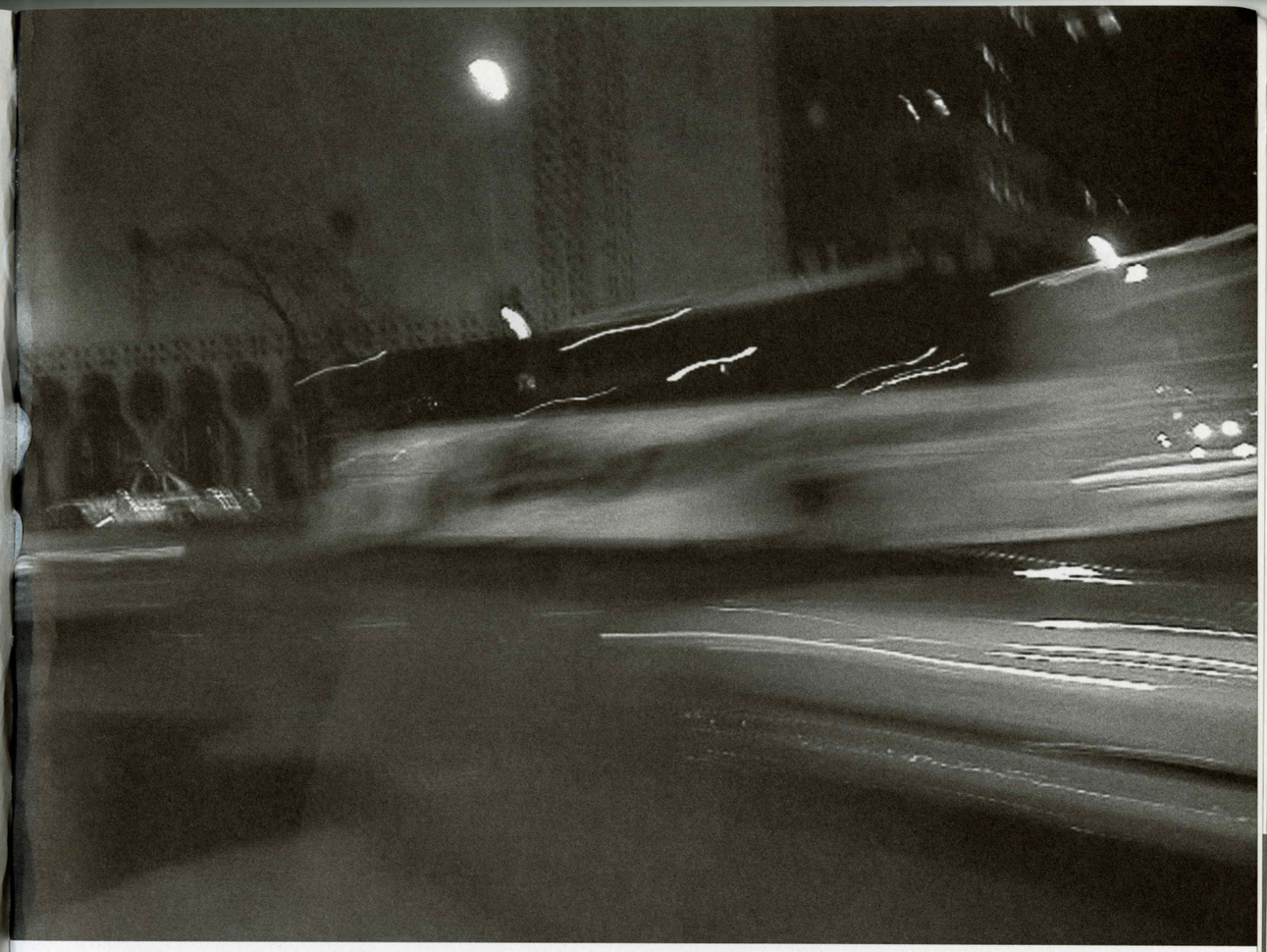
Most riders do not run so frantically. They have tickets, advance ordered, and know the departure time. Their only task at Columbus Circle is to ask the dispatchers which bus is their route. Beginning its trip out of town, the buses creep counterclockwise along the western arc of the circle. Dispatchers, clad in suits and coats, call out in singsong the viscous names of destinations:

Attica! Wende! Buffalo! Attica! Attica!
Woodbourne-n-Sullivan! Woodbourne-n-Sullivan!
Clinton-n-Altona! Clinton-n-Altona!
Franklin-bare-hill-upstate! Franklin-bare-hill-upstate!

Round the circle the buses go, gaining momentum, shooting east to the FDR, or south along Broadway, a conduit to the distant extension of the city. The citizens inside will spend a day or a few hours with their confined loved-one. Conversations will cover a million different topics, business, to the Yankees and Jets, to relations, to love, to weather, to kisses, to interior decorating, to reports from the block, to stories of horrific incidents inside.

Returning to Columbus Circle, stepping out of the bus, the gateway announces homecoming to the solid city, the social city. There is a possibility that urban form can still be a social manifestation rather than a bureaucratic imposition.

When asked how he received permission to use Columbus Circle from the city, Mr. Simmons says, "There was never any need for permission. We just started, right from the beginning in August of 1975, from 59th Street and Broadway, and no one has ever hassled us for using it." END



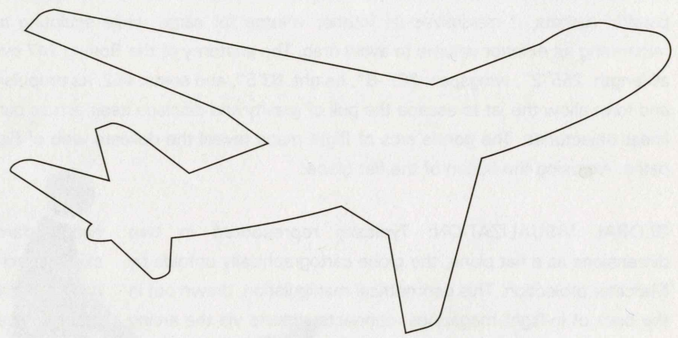
THE GEOMETRY OF

JET LAG

TEXT BY: ERIC HOWLER

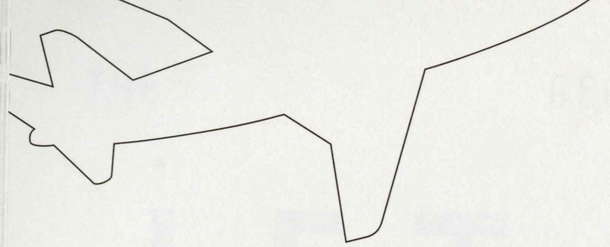
"FROM A COUPLE OF MILES UP, ALL TRACE OF HUMANITY HAS VANISHED. THE WORLD WE KNOW HAS BEEN REPLACED BY BLEAK G E O M E T R Y . "

(F. S. KAHN, THE CURSE OF ICARUS)



JET LAG I: Jet lag is a thoroughly modern ailment. It results from the intersection of high-speed air travel, human bio-chronology and the curvature of the globe. Along with air rage and economy class syndrome, jet lag works its way into the everyday lexicon of symptoms of contemporary living. We've developed the technology to fly, but our terrestrial bodies set the limits of our flight.

BODY I: The human body is a delicate organism: mechanically extended and chemically enhanced. The mechanics of the body are defined by "pivot points" and "link systems," joints and bones.



AVIATION: A marriage of ergonomics and aerodynamics, the airplane is a fragile aluminum vessel, pressurized to an altitude of 6000-8000 ft, and propelled by paraffin rockets, it maximizes its interior volume for cargo while sculpting and minimizing its exterior volume to avoid drag. The anatomy of the Boeing 747 overall length: 255'-2", wingspan: 207'-8", height: 63'5", and seats: 452. Its propulsion and form allow the jet to escape the pull of gravity and displace itself across curvilinear trajectories. The gentle arcs of flight maps reveal the delicate web of flight paths, exposing the fiction of the flat globe.

GLOBAL VISUALIZATION: Typically represented in two dimensions as a flat plane, the globe cartographically unfolds by Mercator projection. This geometrical manipulation, drawn out in the back of in-flight magazines, connects airports via the arcing lines of flight paths.

The globe is a roughly spherical mass spinning about its own axis, with a circumference of 24,870 miles and a diameter of 7,927 miles across the equator with a mass of 6,600 trillion tons, a continuous rotational speed of 620 mph and a constant gravitational force of thirty-two lb. per ft/sec/sec, the geometry of its form and the mechanics of its motion create night and day, summer and winter. Time is a function of geometry.

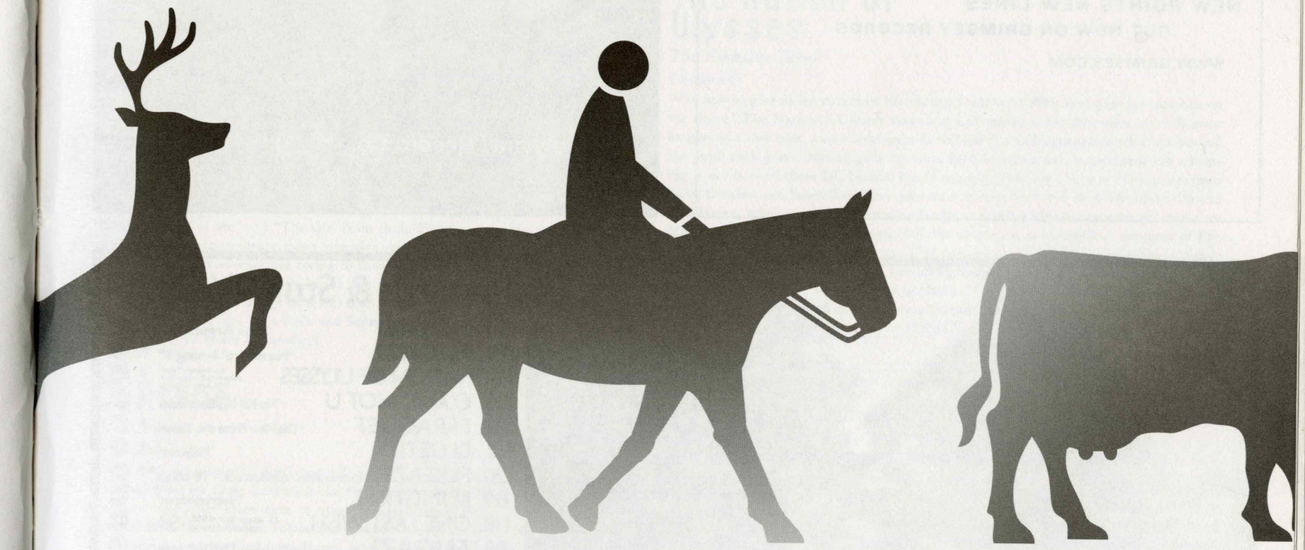
TIME: Time zones conflate politics and geometry, plastically deformed by chrono-political interests. The prime, or zero, meridian is the longitudinal line at Greenwich in the UK. The International Date Line, located on the opposite side of the globe, marks the start of the calendar day, across it, the time of day is the same, but west of the line it is one day later than it is to the east. A cartographic anomaly, the diurnal fault line marks an intersection of geometry, chronometry, cartography and politics.

JET LAG II: Jet lag, otherwise known as jet syndrome, desynchronosis or dysrhythmia, results from the clash of incongruous geometries. The displaced body riding on an arced trajectory reacts to forces of acceleration, altitude adjustment, displacement, rotation and deceleration. The abrupt displacement of transmeridian air travel results in desynchronized daily rhythms. Jet lag's symptoms are a taxonomy of modern ailments: constipation, clammy sweat, diarrhea, disorientation, dry eyes, dry skin, ear ache, fatigue, headache, hemorrhoids, impaired coordination, impaired vision, insomnia, irregular heartbeat, lightheadedness, loss of libido, loss of mental alertness, low blood sugar, memory loss, nausea, reaction to drugs, sore throat, swollen feet, and variations in pulse and temperature. About one hundred of the body's biological functions and activities are affected.

The deteriorated body and its impaired motor and metal functions map the territory of transmeridian displacements. The heart rate, moisture content and blood sugar levels index the displacement.

BODY II: The chronocartography of the body–as instrument, as map, as clock–points to the corpus as the last frontier. The development of drugs to cure disease, improve sexual performance and keep the body awake promise better living through chemistry. Melatonins, No-Doz and aspirin are pharmaceutical countermeasures in a biological war against our own body clocks. Melantonin is a widely available drug that is naturally produced during the nocturnal phase. When taken during transmeridian air travel, it acts as chemical camouflage to reset the body's biological clock.

Air travel requires an escape from gravity, an escape from distance, and ultimately an escape from our bodies. The geometries of jet lag chart a relationship between the planetary scale of the globe and the microscopic scale of our pineal glands. Corporeal symptoms are a reminder of our bodies' persistence in an increasingly disembodied world. END



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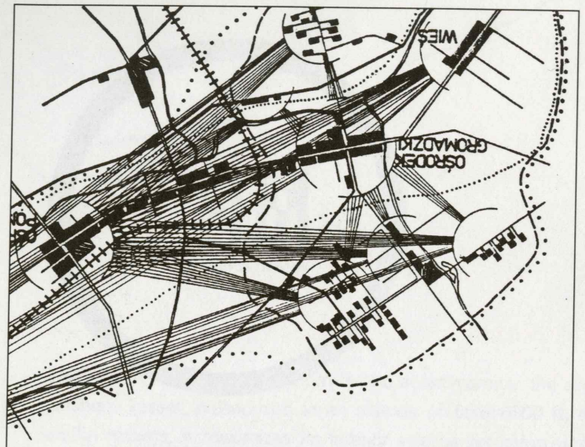

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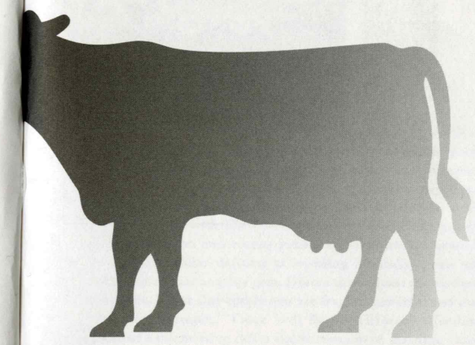
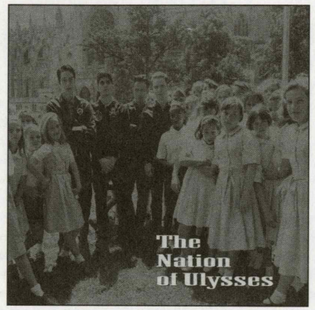




Kings of Convenience

Quiet Is The New Loud

Source

The Kings of Convenience are two young men from Norway who both play guitars and come off like a narcoleptic Belle and Sebastian. These young men, Erik and Erelnd, are also very photogenic and seemingly poised to "make it" is some way, at least that seems to be their label's goal. Unchallenging but pretty songs, imported voices and decided cuteness make for a winning formula for commercial success. Their single "Toxic Girl," in spite of derivative licks, has charted in the UK. The catchiest songs are the most memorable ones, primarily because the others tend to barely cling to the audible world. "Singing Softly to Me" and "The Girl from Back Then" register the most because of a more dynamic song structure, more inventive vocal work and an expanded arrangement. The Kings of Convenience are trying to squeeze into the niche of indie-easy-listening which is slowly getting filled by bands like Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, the Sea and Cake, etc. If you go for those things then this disc will no doubt find a place on your shelf. If you're still unsure, take out a Belle and Sebastian 45, turn it to 33 and pretend it will be dark for months. (Jesse LeCavalier)

Califone

Roomsound

Perishable

Is this a country record? I don't know. Does it matter? I don't care. Califone used to be Red Red Meat for those interested and the two, I suppose, are difficult to distinguish. Califone take their place next to other rock-folk-roots hybrids like Modest Mouse, Neutral Milk Hotel, Wilco, Palace and others. Through clenched teeth and over loops, tambourines, and muffled bass drums, guitarist Tim Rutili sings about the Catholic Church, alcohol, and sex with references to some traditional music which, according to him "is all about figuring out a proper balance between sex and learning to pray-just like Prince." This is a dense, atmospheric, and often spooky recording that merits attention, especially with songs like "Sometimes, like that last pull of Jack Daniels." It is occasionally too murky and viscous, something that can be welcome, but often regrettable. (JleC)

Tristeza

Dream Signals In Full Circles

Tiger Style

Elevator music for two story buildings, this album contains nine songs that are like a televised baseball game on a summer Saturday - perfect if you're doing something else at the same time. The songs here are all so unassuming that you tend to forget about them while you're listening. Now, I like baseball and there are some tracks that are stunners in a certain Mogwai-without-the-catharsis kind of way. "Building Peaks" and "Respira" stand out because of the textural accumulation and, dare I say it, hooks. They are also the first two entries of a release whose end I can never remember. Tristeza still haven't quite learned how to start or end songs, most fade in and fade out, as if to give listeners three minutes of an otherwise infinite tract. If pretty music with an adolescent awkwardness to it is your gig, have a seat because it's the top of the seventh. (JleC)

The Nation of Ulysses

The Embassy Tapes

Dischord

Why now to give us ten cuts from the Nation's archives? Why apologize for tape hiss on the sleeve? The Nation of Ulysses made it a point never to say they were sorry. It must be part of a new plot, a new stratagem to reclaim the underground youth from beyond the punk rock grave. Nation puts the verse back in subversive, so post-mortem scheming is not beyond these DC heroes. Ian Svenonius with other former Nation members Steve Gamboa and James Canty has gone on to preach the word with The Make-Up and Tim Green, while not in the recording booth, is making kids happy with his capital-m Metal project The Fucking Champs. Still, the innocence, as captured on the cover of The Embassy Tapes is lost. I guess it's not 1992 anymore.... The Embassy privileges attitude over finesse. This album is about screaming and looking good all wrapped up in the Nation's progressively anachronistic aesthetic. "Outline for Hangout" with its chorus "got nuthin' to do, wanna do it with you" is perfectly indicative of the recording's attitude and the lazy revolution that is welcome, even with the tape hiss. (JleC)

The Jealous Sound

The Jealous Sound EP

Better Looking Records

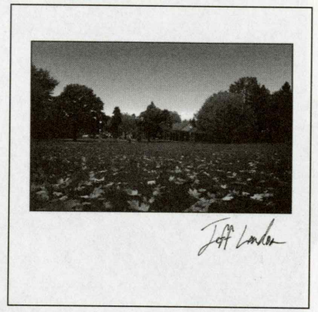
Crafting a perfect EP is a tricky business. The Archers of Loaf did it once, so did Pavement. With the risk of sounding easy to please, The Jealous Sound might have done it as well. The Jealous Sound is a gift horse rising out of the ashes of honor-roll band Knapsack and each of these five complex concise tracks is full of surprises. Blair Shehan can sing. In fact, Blair Shehan could sing his grocery list to me and I would be happy. What carries this release though is not his voice but an understanding of how to wield it and a whole mess of production. The Jealous Sound's restrained and layered vocal tracks, varied instrumentation and interwoven song structures give the songs a certain sheen and also distance them from the quite-loud emo bin into which Knapsack releases were often tossed. Many of the songs are slow to develop and demand some attention. "Priceless" for example has like three different choruses, all buried deep down, the buckshot in the Christmas goose. Some might call these "overwrought" but each cut has its own integrity that can survive the numerous competing elements or length. "Anxious Arms" is nearly five minutes, way above the pop-punk ceiling. The Jealous Sound don't necessarily innovate, but like Kobe Bryant out on the floor, man, can they create. On a side note, the packaging is a little listless, which is a disappointment given the strong showings by the three Knapsack releases. (JleC)

AFI

The Art of Drowning

Nitro Records

The hardcore/punk rock quartet, AFI, has done it again with their latest album The Art of Drowning. From lead singer, David Havoc's, hard-hitting lyrics to guitarist, Jade Puget's ultimate sound, this record has it all. Fourteen killer tracks in all, songs like "Sacrifice Theory" and "Smile" are hard to resist. This album, like previous recordings, gets you pumped and ready to kick shit up in the pit. (Jess Goldstein)



LETTER:

Dear loud paper,

Well, I guess we never did get to meet. Were you at the show? I'm back in Portland, safe and sound, trying to book some shows in Cali for my own music. Hopefully, its not too late to send you some pithy comments concerning popular culture, architecture and the like. After reading your publication, it dawned on me that there were a good amount of architectural-type references in my songs.

I strive to associate mental landscapes with physical ones to represent, i.e., claustrophobia in love through one's presence in a cramped urban place. For instance, in "Humphrey Hill," the protagonist sings of, "mounds of candles in your closet, from the shrine I never built for you, that room had nearly swallowed me, a cage with a brick wall view." In Grenada, the first verse essentially compares, Grenada, Spain, with my Portland town, on a bad day for the narrator. In singing about malls ("someone built the downtown malls but didn't sign their names") and the lack of alleys and sidewalk gathering spaces, ("no alleyways to hide within, can't hold us watchers so, bars become our castles sidewalks open into moats, no one walks and talks aloud anymore...") I tried to compare a sense a common public space and architectural timelessness (the Alhambra and Grenada) with the makeshift, temporary and individually oriented nature of today's urban landscape.

In fact, the whole record [co. Sanders Park] is named after a public park in Portland, which is ragged and unfinished, and home to public gardens, napping vagrants, roughshod hoopsters and the whole gamut of those struggling to locate themselves physically in the so-called public spaces of their city.

I hope any of this is useful to you, and bravo for bringing the intersection of architecture, pop culture and urban life to the foreground of the print world.

Sincerely,
Jeff London

The Mountain Goats

The Coroner's Gambit

Absolutely Kosher

This album is devastating. So much so that it's hardly worth a try at cleverness. Besides, John Darnielle of the Mountain Goats seems to have that market cornered. Those familiar with other Mountain Goats' work may know what to expect, but they will still be surprised. There are more acrobatics here, more vocal modulation and even a few bits of banjo, violin, percussion, and others. In past releases, there is either singy-John or shouty-John but with The Coroner's Gambit the field is expanded to include new entries like breathy-John and croony-John - all of which are welcome. New tricks aside, it is Darnielle's familiar deftness at wedding his incisive wit with lyrical poignancy that makes this release another gem. Dotted throughout the disc are moments of intense crystallization. These tiny epiphanies are fragile, powerful and ready to collapse upon themselves. For example, "There Will Be No Divorce" effortlessly compounds the entire nature of a relationship into a single moment of morning awakening that's as wonderful and tragic as anything he has written. As with previous outings, Darnielle's geographic preoccupations surface on tracks like "Jaipur" and "We Were Patriots," this time mostly orbiting around India. In an oeuvre otherwise marked by a peculiar and delightful sense of humor, The Coroner's Gambit has a darker subtext as revealed in the liner notes and Darnielle's address to a friend who committed suicide. That extra layer gives the whole release more emotional weight than in the past that perhaps renders it less fun, but allows a deeper resonance. (JleC)

Semiautomatic

The Trebuchet

Vex Records

At some point this New York City duo developed into an unpredictable electronic force to be reckoned. Abandoning the naivete of their earlier cassette-only release (had mixed results) the duo began refining their sound and songwriting skills prior to their debut full-length release. The full range of their abilities is present now on this compelling and genuinely unique recording The Trebuchet. Combining the fuzzy drum-n-bass acrobatics of an U.N.K.L.E or Dr. Octagon, the dizzying electronics of Aphextwin and the pop sensibilities of, say Beck, Semiuatomatic sets about creating a musical pastiche that is at once both referential and thoroughly original. DJ Rop's prior experiments with cutting up old New Wave records factor little now. The Trebuchet is an accomplished, complex arrangement of electronic gadgetry, piano, guitars, scratching, layered vocals and samples (including downright awesome R2D2 snippets they've built a whole song around!) A truly inspiring example of the possibilities technology allows new music. (William Rivera)

Jason Falkner

Necessity: The 4-Track Years

spinART Records

My interest in Jason Falkner's music follows a path not unlike the timing of this latest release-roundabout. From unwittingly enjoying his contribution to the long-defunct band The Grays to finding out a little more about the fellow by reading through Eric Matthews' liner notes to a full-blown fascination with the otherwise obscure songwriter's solo albums and occasional 7" releases: I had little idea of what to expect when my roommate gave me this record as a gift. Was it to be the some kind of "greatest hits" or so-called "rarities" record, the likes of which are constantly released prematurely? Thankfully, no. A sucker for hooks and melodies, I was moved at first to tears, by the sheer beauty these pop songs possess. The more I listen to the record, the more I recognize Falkner's genius-and genius in rock and roll, my friends, is indeed rare.

So, how do we recognize genius? When we are gently invited to stand in wonder at the paradox the work inspires in a person. And Necessity has plenty of paradox and inspiration to share with the public. Take the fact that all of the songs on this release have seemingly simple phrases and lyrics. Repeated listening yields the unforced emergence of a complex and subtle musical expression that doesn't impose itself on you. Yet the simplicity remains! Falkner's lyrics are playful (check out the Christopher Walken impression in "His Train") and exuberant, utterly elegant in appearance, but sublime in their meaning. What more can you ask for? Don't even ask me to get into how well the songs are recorded. You say you want music, eh? Pick this up and get listening. (Antonio Girafez)

Echo & the Bunnymen

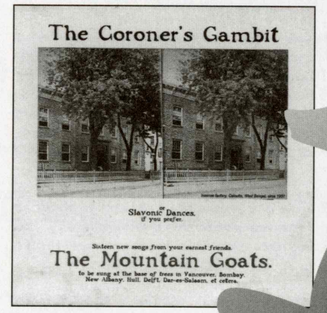
Crystal Days 1979 - 1999

Warner Archives/Rhino

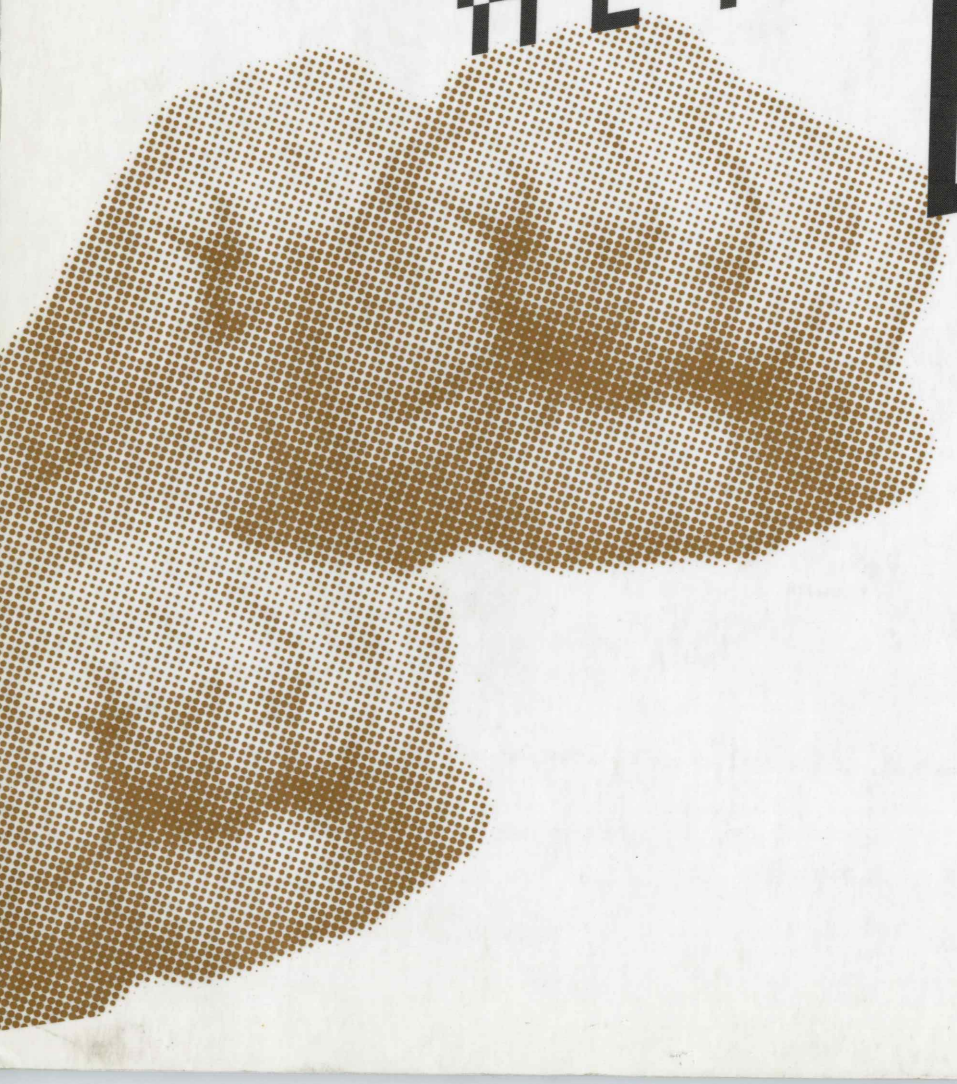
One tends to listen to retrospectives with concern to one's own history. At least I do. I first listened to Echo and the Bunnymen on wet, fall days driving along the shiny, slick pavement to suburban cul-de-sacs. Everything was romantic that year. People around me had tragic crushes, beautiful sweaters and manicured front lawns. The Smiths were about to break up. A girl I knew moped all year over a boy named Scott. She often rode in the car next to me and her cardigan smelt of hairspray and Camel cigarettes. She made these mix tapes with Joy Division, the Cure, Love and Rockets and Echo and the Bunnymen. She used to sing "A Promise." "You said something will change/We were all dressed up/Somewhere to go/No sign of rain/But something will change/You promised" she sang quietly to herself. My friend Willey and I weren't listening, we were too busy discussing singers in respect to romantic poets. Ian McCulloch was Byron to Robert Smith's Shelley and Morrisey's Keats. I listened to "the Game" as I walked my dog around our subdivision; the street lights forming large, dull circles on the pavement. I measured the blocks in large, softening circles of light. Everyone was making mix tapes for each other with all the same bands. My favorite Echo and the Bunnymen gems of those mix tapes are on this collection: the droning cover of "All You Need is Love."

The Bunnymen were there for me years later when I fell in love. I fell in love so hard that I couldn't sleep. I watched buses run all night out my window until, with their increasing frequency, I knew dawn was arriving. I listened to the "Killing Moon" - "Under blue moon I saw you/So soon you'll take me/Up in your arms/Too late to beg you or cancel it"- and "Seven Seas" as I wrote her countless letters while she toiled in studio at a far away art school. I listened and thought of her smooth, small hands and her fuzzy sweaters. Later, we were in the same city and listened to "Never Stop" while driving along tree-lined streets to her place where we would sleep on soft white sheets and awake to the morning light forcing geometric patterns on her hand made, checkered curtains.

Recommended if you ever have or ever plan to fall in love. (Count Del Monte)



FORWARD COMRADES, WE MUST GO BACK!



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